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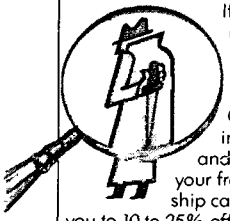

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"If you don't want to end up like Rex Sampson," the letter said, "assemble $100,000 in small bills in a plastic trash bag and keep it in your car. Await further instructions. This is not a joke! The Thunderer."

Another beautifully crafted Captain Leopold story from Edward D. Hoch. A collection of 19 Leopold stories, Leopold's Way, *edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg, has recently been published by Southern Illinois University Press . . .*

LEOPOLD AND THE THUNDERER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It wasn't until after the second death that someone called it murder.

That someone was Marcia Wagner, widow of Philip Wagner, the president of a small electronics firm who'd died in a one-car crash on the expressway. She sat in Captain Leopold's office two days after the funeral and told him, "I think my husband was murdered."

Leopold was used to dealing with family members who sometimes imagined the darkest fantasies to explain the otherwise inexplicable death of a loved one. "He was speeding on the expressway, Mrs. Wagner. The car went out of control and hit a bridge abutment. The accident was fully investigated."

"Not fully enough."

Leopold didn't like her tone of voice. She was a woman in her forties, apparently used to prompt attention from public servants. He decided to be blunt. "Mrs. Wagner, one-car accidents like these

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are most often suicides. People choose this way out for insurance purposes, or to avoid pain to their families."

"Philip did not kill himself. He was murdered. Read this."

She pulled a folded letter from her purse and passed it across the desk to Leopold. There was a newspaper clipping with the letter, which was brief and to the point: *If you don't want to end up like Rex Sampson, assemble $100,000 in small bills in a plastic trash bag and keep it in your car. Await further instructions. This is not a joke! The Thunderer.* It had been typed on an electric typewriter or a word processor. Leopold unfolded the accompanying clipping and read a two-week-old newspaper account of a fatal one-car accident involving a man named Rex Sampson. As he remembered the incident, there had been no hint of foul play. Sampson's car had crashed through a construction barrier and overturned.

"This is hardly proof," Leopold said, placing the clipping on his desk. "But it is provocative. Where did you find this?"

"In his desk drawer, under his checkbook. He never told me about it."

"Had he made a withdrawal from the bank?"

"No. I'm sure he didn't take the threat seriously or he'd have called the police."

"Yet he kept the letter and didn't tell you about it." Leopold turned his attention to the envelope, addressed to the electronics firm. The postmark was three days before Philip Wagner's death. "We'll test it for fingerprints," he assured her, "though I doubt if we'll find anything useful. It was probably just some crank. Your husband's death in that accident was merely a coincidence."

"I don't believe in coincidences like that," Marcia Wagner said.

Neither did Leopold.

But there was little to be done about the death of Philip Wagner. The car, a total loss, had been towed to Worldwide Auto Parts, a junkyard that had the contract for city towing. Wagner's body was already two days in the ground and his widow stopped short of asking that it be exhumed. "Let him rest in peace," she decided. "The body won't show anything, anyway. He was probably forced off the road."

It seemed doubtful that could have happened in broad daylight along the expressway without anyone witnessing it, but Leopold didn't press the point. He settled for calling the junkyard and talking with Danny Andrews, one of the partners there. It was about as he'd expected. "The insurance company said it was all ours. Totaled,

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Captain. We took off the tires and doors that could be used, and my partner Ed took out the radio, the telephone, and the tape deck. The rest of it we mashed this morning."

"Thanks, anyway," Leopold said and hung up.

It was Sergeant Fletcher, two days later, who announced the next development. "I've got an extortion case, Captain. It might be the same guy who wrote that Wagner letter."

Leopold was immediately interested.

Fletcher took his favorite chair opposite Leopold's desk and opened a folder. "A man by the name of Frank Godfrey came in this morning. Claims he knows Chief Coffey. He got this letter in yesterday's mail, along with two newspaper clippings."

Leopold took the letter and read it. The wording was almost identical to the earlier one: *If you don't want to end up like Rex Sampson and Philip Wagner, assemble $100,000 in small bills in a plastic trash bag and keep it in your car. Await further instructions. This is not a joke! The Thunderer.* The clippings detailed the car crashes that had taken the lives of Sampson and Wagner.

"Looks like the same typewriter," Leopold observed. "Tell me about Godfrey."

"Forty-six, president of a savings and loan, divorced, living alone."

"What about his car?"

"A fancy Mercedes with all the trimmings."

"Put someone on him day and night, especially when he's in his car."

"You think it's that serious, Captain?"

"I think we can't risk a third death."

But a third death was exactly what they had the following day. Sergeant Connie Trent was following behind Frank Godfrey's Mercedes on the southern expressway when suddenly, without warning, it swerved to the left, plowed into the median guard rail, and flipped over on its side. Godfrey was dead by the time Connie reached the car.

Leopold read the report with utter disbelief. "You were right behind him when it happened and you saw nothing unusual, Connie?"

"Not a thing, Captain. I'd spoken to him at his house and he seemed fine, even joked about having a woman bodyguard."

"Could a car have passed him and fired a shot through his window?"

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"Impossible. There were no cars that close at the time. And his windows were closed. I think he had the air-conditioning on."

The wrecked car had been towed to the police garage and Leopold followed Connie downstairs to look at it. "Not as badly smashed up as the other two," he observed. "He might have lived through it."

"But he didn't."

"I want a full autopsy, Connie. I want to know exactly what killed him."

"The accident—"

"He might have been dead before the crash. That's what I want to know."

It bothered him. There were now three dead men and no clues except for the extortion letters. Were the men dead because they had refused to pay? To his knowledge, Frank Godfrey hadn't even been contacted after the first letter. What sort of killer sent a letter like that and then struck without further warning?

The car yielded nothing and neither did the autopsy. There was no trace of poison, drugs, or alcohol. Leopold turned to another line of investigation and tried to determine if there was anything linking the three victims. Rex Sampson was a yacht broker with an office on the Sound, Philip Wagner was president of an electronics firm, and Frank Godfrey was president of a savings-and-loan association. The first two were married, the third was divorced. All were in their forties or early fifties, but they had not gone to school together or lived in the same neighborhoods. All were well off financially, but Leopold wouldn't have expected an extortionist to go after anyone who wasn't.

The question was whether or not the writer of the notes was killing them. Three deaths in such a short period of time seemed more than coincidental. If the accidents had been deliberate, that meant some sort of tampering with the cars. The fact that all had occurred on the expressway suggested that some critical part might have given out at high speeds.

By the time Leopold had gotten the autopsy report, the police technicians had finished work on Godfrey's car. When he phoned the garage to ask its whereabouts, he was told it had been released to the family on orders of the Chief. "What family is that?" Leopold grumbled. "I thought he was divorced."

"There's a sister, and a grown son. They're handling the arrangements. Talk to the Chief if there's any problem, Captain."

"I think I will . . ."

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Chief Coffey had only held the position for a year, but Leopold had already formed a dislike of the man. He'd come east from a midwestern city where politics and the establishment ruled and had brought that way of life with him. He listened blandly to Leopold's complaint and replied, "Captain, you must know that Frank Godfrey was one of our leading citizens, a bank president—"

"Savings and loan," Leopold corrected. "What I'm asking is why I wasn't consulted. It's my case, after all."

"It's not your case yet, Captain. You're in charge of homicide and violent crimes. All you have so far are two letters demanding money."

"And three dead bodies."

"Godfrey was alone in his car, with one of your policewomen following. Our technicians found nothing. Most likely the letter so unnerved him that he smashed up accidentally."

"Do you really believe that?"

"It's as plausible as some sort of master criminal hurling thunderbolts at these cars."

"We'll see," Leopold said, and returned downstairs to his office in the squadroom.

Fletcher brought in two cups of coffee from the balky machine in the hall.

"This one's as bad as the old one. I lost a quarter in it yesterday," he grumbled.

Leopold drank and made a face. "I wouldn't mind if the coffee tasted any good."

"How'd your meeting with the Chief go?"

"Not too well. Frank Godfrey was a leading citizen and the technicians had finished with the car, anyway, so when the family asked for it he released it."

"Without asking you?"

"He was quick to tell me it wasn't my case yet. No evidence of murder."

"Whoever's sending those letters isn't going to stop now."

"No," Leopold agreed. "Find out where they took Godfrey's car, Fletcher. I want another look at it."

"Danny Andrews probably took it out to his place. I'll check."

Leopold phoned his wife Molly after five to tell her he'd be late. It wasn't anything unusual. They dined apart about half the time, when he was involved in an important case or she was delayed at

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her law office. "Is it those car accidents?" she asked. "Tonight's paper mentions an extortion attempt."

"I'll tell you when I get home. It shouldn't be too late."

By that time, Fletcher had confirmed that the Mercedes was at Worldwide Auto Parts and Leopold decided to stop there on his way home.

The auto graveyard sat just over the city line in one of the less prosperous suburbs. It occupied several acres of land and was carefully fenced in to shield the neighborhood from the less-than-scenic view. A cinder-block office in front held a counter and desks for the two partners. That was where Leopold found Danny Andrews. Danny handled the towing part of the business while his older partner Ed Sterling ran a side business, selling telecommunications equipment for cars.

"Hello, Danny," Leopold greeted him. "I'm looking for that Mercedes you brought in this morning from the police garage."

Danny looked up from one of the paperbacks on British history with which he often passed the time. "Ed's stripping it now. Nice car. Could have been fixed up if the family wanted. It's around back by the tow truck."

Ed Sterling was a stocky, bald man Leopold had recently seen at a restaurant with his strikingly handsome wife. She was the best thing Sterling had going for him. "This the Godfrey car, Ed?" Leopold asked.

"Guess so." Sterling wiped the grease from his right hand with a rag and extended it. "How's it going, Captain?"

Leopold shook hands. "Pretty good. What are you doing here?"

Sterling went back to removing an antenna from the car's trunk lid. "Stripping her down. I can use these parts in my other business."

Leopold walked around to the front of the car and tried to open the hood. Finally, Sterling had to help pry it open with a tire iron. The radiator was smashed in, but the rest of the engine seemed in working order. Leopold climbed into the driver's seat. The key was in the ignition. He tried the radio, getting a rock group on a New Haven station. There were still traces of fingerprint powder on the car's interior, signs that the technical crew had done their job. "You know anything about steering?" he asked Ed.

"A little."

With Sterling's help, Leopold inspected the steering and the fuel

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line, then turned his attention to the brakes. Allowing for the damage done by the crash, everything seemed in working order.

They walked back to the office together.

Danny Andrews was finishing some paperwork. "Satisfied, Captain?"

"Who sold you the Mercedes?" Leopold asked. "The dead man's sister?"

"His son Raymond."

"I'd have thought the insurance company would have wanted it repaired."

"The son wouldn't keep the car. I guess he told the insurance company he could never bring himself to drive it. And these foreign beauties are hell to make over. He was probably right to junk it."

"Almost as if he didn't want anyone snooping around underneath, trying to fix it."

Danny shrugged and didn't answer.

Leopold got into his car and drove home.

When Molly switched on the late news, it was obvious where the press and television had gotten their information. Raymond Godfrey, the dead man's son, was busy denouncing the police. He was a slight, sandy-haired young man who came across as something of a crusader on television. His father's death, and the police inaction, had become a special cause to him.

"Make no mistake about it," he thundered at the camera, "none of us is safe with this killer free! My father won't be the last to die. While the police sit on their hands, someone else will get a threatening letter. But maybe the next person will be smart enough to pay up, knowing the police won't protect him!"

"I'm turning this off," Molly said. "You've had enough of it for one day."

But Leopold wanted to see the rest of it. When the newscaster switched to the baseball scores, he said, "Raymond Godfrey seems anxious to stress the idea of an extortionist, series killer."

"That's what it is, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," Leopold agreed. "There's no hint of anything else. But tomorrow I think I'll look into the first death—Rex Sampson's. We've pretty much overlooked that one."

Sampson's wife Ruth was something of a surprise. Bright and authoritative, she spoke quickly and moved about the room as she talked. "Rex killed himself, I'm sure of it. This business about some-

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one called The Thunderer is a lot of rubbish. That's why I won't talk to the press."

"He received no threatening letter?"

"The only threatening letter he got was one from his former partner in a home-repair business."

Leopold perked up. "Home repair?"

She nodded. "They had a repair business two years ago. Rex bought out his partner, Clancy Higgins, with a promise to pay him a percentage of the profits for the following year. Clancy discovered my husband had cheated him with a set of false books and threatened to sue. There was ten thousand dollars involved."

Leopold was doubtful. "Would that be enough to cause him to kill himself?"

"Clancy was going to the District Attorney with the information. He claimed Rex had been cheating his suppliers, too."

"Still, there was no evidence of suicide. I suppose the car was a total loss after it went through that barrier."

"Not at all. I had it fixed up and I'm driving it. Do you want to see it?"

Leopold did. He followed her out of the modest house to a side yard where a five-year-old Ford sat on a cinder driveway. The front right fender had been replaced but not yet repainted. "Do you mind if I get in?"

"Go ahead."

He sat behind the steering wheel of the car, borrowed Ruth's key to start the engine, and tried the radio. It seemed ordinary, like millions of others. "Was the car just like this when your husband was alive?"

"Yes. The fenders were all the same color then, of course."

"Do you think he would have told you if he received a threatening letter?"

"I'm sure he would have. We had no secrets. He told me all about Clancy's threats."

"Perhaps I should go see Clancy Higgins."

She smiled, perhaps a bit wistfully. "If you do, say hello to him for me. We had a lot of fun together."

Leopold found Higgins tending bar at a neighborhood tavern on the south side of the city, near the waterfront. He was a man in his forties whose prematurely grey hair made him appear older. "You want to talk about Rex Sampson?" he asked Leopold, barely glancing

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at the badge. "The best thing he ever did was to die. He swindled me out of ten grand and probably more besides that."

Leopold nodded. "You know the media is calling him the first victim of this Thunderer."

"That's crazy. The best year he ever had, Rex never saw half of a hundred grand. Anyone who thought he had that kind of money is just plain nuts."

"If he swindled you, maybe you had a reason to kill him."

"Not me, Captain. I wanted him alive so he could pay me what he owed me."

"His widow thinks he committed suicide."

"Ruth? How is Ruth these days?"

"Fine. She said to say hello. What about the suicide? Do you think it's a possibility?"

"Maybe," Higgins answered with a shrug. "Maybe he's still alive, hiding out somewhere till he can start a new life. I learned a long time ago that nothing is ever what it seems."

Leopold went back to headquarters wondering if The Thunderer was really what he seemed. Or was the whole thing a mirage to cover up a crime of another sort?

Two days later, after a half dozen possible leads had petered out, a man walked into Leopold's office with the answer.

"I thought you might want to talk to me, Captain," he said. "I'm the latest victim of The Thunderer."

"You've received a letter?"

"I have. I don't believe we've met. I'm Jason Ulster. I own the Ulster Art Gallery out at Soundview Mall."

Leopold remembered him then from photographs in the newspaper. He looked more like a grey-haired banker than a gallery owner. Since coming to the city a few years back, he'd become well known in local art circles. "I should have recognized you, Mr. Ulster. Please have a seat."

Jason Ulster extracted a letter from his pocket. "This came yesterday. I waited a day before telling anyone, trying to decide what to do about it."

Leopold read the familiar wording, only slightly altered from the previous notes: *If you don't want to end up like Rex Sampson, Philip Wagner, and Frank Godfrey, assemble $100,000 in cash (small bills) in a plastic trash bag and keep in your car. Await further instructions. This is not a joke! The Thunderer.*

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"Do you have that sort of money?" Leopold asked.

"I could probably raise it. Naturally, I hope it won't be necessary."

"I hope so, too." Leopold picked up the phone and summoned Lieutenant Fletcher and Connie Trent. After he introduced everyone and explained the situation, he said, "This time we're going to do it right. Mr. Ulster, I want you to go through the motions of withdrawing a large sum of money from the bank and transferring it to a plastic trash bag as instructed. Fletcher will help you with that part. I don't think our man will wait too long to make contact if he thinks you're riding around with that much money."

"What about me?" Connie asked. "Do you want me to follow the car again?"

"Yes, but stay farther back this time. Let another car get between you if necessary."

"What good can I do from there if something happens in the car?"

"You'll just provide backup. We'll have someone in the car itself, crouched in the back seat."

Fletcher's jaw dropped. "Who'd be foolish enough to take that assignment after what happened to the other three cars?"

"I'm not asking for volunteers," Leopold told him. "I'll do it myself."

"Captain, you can't!" Connie insisted.

"It'll be perfectly safe as long as we stay one jump ahead of the killer, and I think I can do that. I think I know where to expect the threat."

Ulster got to his feet. "You're certain my money will be safe?"

"Take out a small amount, with lots of dollar bills. Fletcher will do the rest with cut-up newspapers. We just need it to look legitimate in case The Thunderer is watching from a distance through binoculars."

"The Thunderer," Connie said with a shudder. "It's as if he thinks he's God or something."

Jason Ulster allowed himself a smile for the first time since entering the office. "Or the London *Times*. I think it used to be called The Thunderer a long time ago."

"It did?" Leopold thought about it and while Fletcher accompanied Ulster to the bank, he made a trip to the public library.

They were gambling that the extortionist had not observed Ulster's visit to police headquarters—or if he had, that it wouldn't deter him. Leopold slipped into the back seat of Ulster's white Cad-

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illac under cover of a large van that blocked the view from the street. Ulster had placed the trash bag, bulging with cut newspapers and a few small bills, on the back seat, where it would be clearly visible from a passing car. Leopold was partly covered by a blanket.

"What do I do now?" Ulster asked.

"Head for the expressway. And try not to move your lips when you speak. Someone in a passing car might notice."

"You think he's watching me that closely?"

"I'm sure of it."

"I don't know about this," Ulster muttered, showing his first signs of nervousness. "The other three died on the expressway."

"Would you feel better if I told you how they died?"

"What do you mean?"

Their speed was picking up now, approaching sixty as Leopold continued talking. "Up in my office this morning, I didn't have to ask you if your car was equipped with a telephone. I knew it was before I even saw it."

"How?"

"His instructions were to drive around with the money and await further instructions. He has to have some way of reaching you in your car."

"What about the others?"

"I was told there was a telephone in Wagner's car, but it meant nothing to me at the time. I also saw an antenna being removed from the trunk lid of Godfrey's car, but again I didn't make the connection."

"It might not have been for a telephone."

"It had to be either that or a two-way radio. I tried the dashboard radio later and it worked perfectly, so its antenna was still in place."

As if to punctuate Leopold's words, the telephone up front gave a sudden buzz. "Should I answer it?" Ulster asked.

"Carefully. Hold the earpiece well away from your ear. Your life may depend upon it."

The car phone buzzed again and, with some hesitation, Ulster answered it. "Hello?"

Leopold could hear the muffled reply. "Mr. Ulster, you have the money?"

"Who is this?"

"You know. Listen carefully and answer clearly or you're a dead man. Do you have the money?"

"Yes."

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"Good. Continue driving on the expressway. Just after you pass over Heartling Avenue, you'll see a fenced-in lot on the right. Pull your car onto the shoulder of the road and toss the trash bag over the embankment. Then keep going. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"If you make a wrong move, you're a dead man like the others. I won't warn you twice."

"I understand."

There was a humming on the line as the connection was broken. Jason Ulster hung up and asked Leopold, "Do I obey him?"

"You'd better."

Leopold was plotting the location of the money drop in his mind, and unless he was mistaken the fenced-in lot was at the back of the property owned by Worldwide Auto Parts. He felt the car slowing down and Ulster opened the right-hand window. He took the plastic trash bag and shoved it through the opening. As it tumbled down the embankment, a passing car honked its displeasure.

"Now what, Captain?"

"Start driving again, like he said."

Within a minute, the car telephone buzzed again. Jason Ulster picked up the receiver and placed it to his ear without thinking. Leopold heard a high-pitched whine and struck out instantly, knocking the receiver from Ulster's hand. The car wavered for an instant as Ulster gasped and grabbed at his ear. "I'm bleeding!"

"You're all right—it's just a scratch! Hang onto the steering wheel!" Leopold reached over the seat back and picked up the fallen telephone receiver. Extending out from one of the holes in the earpiece was a slim needle about an inch and a half long.

"Here's what killed the others," Leopold said. "It was triggered by that high-pitched whine over the phone. As effective as an icepick in the ear, I imagine, and just as hard to spot in an autopsy. Even if it didn't penetrate all the way to the brain, the resulting accident would do the job and cover up all the traces."

"My God."

"You can head back to headquarters now. I think I'm about ready to wrap up The Thunderer case."

It was growing dark when Leopold pulled up in front of Worldwide Auto Parts. Danny Andrews was just climbing down from his tow truck, unhooking a wreck he'd brought in from somewhere. He glanced up and waved as he recognized Leopold.

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"How's business, Danny?"

"Too good. Some fools are always killing themselves."

"Is Ed Sterling around?"

"You'll find him out in back somewhere."

"Do you guys work all night?"

"Seems like it, sometimes."

Leopold left his car and strolled back between the rows of wrecked autos. Wrecked dreams, he supposed. He wondered what it was like to work in a place like this every day, stripping away the pieces of dreams.

"Hello, Ed," he said, coming upon the man crouched over the grillwork of a 1980 Buick. "Getting pretty dark to work."

"I'm just finishing up. What you want, Captain?"

"I want to talk, Ed. About these killings—about The Thunderer."

Sterling didn't look up. "Got any leads yet?"

"Some pretty good ones. He tried it again this afternoon, but this time we were ready."

"Yeah? What'd he try?" Ed Sterling got to his feet, wiping his greasy palms on his jeans.

"Extortion, same as before. A trash bag full of money was thrown from that embankment back there. It probably landed in the empty lot."

"Is that so?"

"Then The Thunderer tried to kill his intended victim, anyway, just like the others."

"How was that?"

"With a car telephone rigged to drive a sharp needle through his ear to his brain when a high-pitched sound was heard. It was a good enough scheme, I suppose. It killed two people and almost got a third one today."

"I thought there were three victims."

"The Thunderer didn't need to commit the first crime. He simply took Rex Sampson's accident out of the newspaper and used it for his own purpose, to frighten the others into paying up."

"And did they?"

"Not the first two. They doubted, and they died."

"Why are you telling me all this, Captain?" Sterling asked.

"Because I think you are The Thunderer, Ed. It had to be someone who could get at their cars, to rig the needle device in their radios. I think your telecommunications company installed those car telephones. I think there might be a dozen others riding around the city

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right now, waiting for you to blow your deadly whistle and murder their owners."

"That's crazy! You really believe that?"

"Ed, the bag of money was dropped in your back yard. You installed each of those telephones. We already checked that out. And you removed them after the accidents. I saw you removing the one from Frank Godfrey's car, remember?"

"What sort of evidence is that?"

"But your biggest mistake was in the choice of a name. I suppose The Thunderer appealed to you. It sounded mighty and godlike, and it conveyed the idea of your airborne whistle triggering death in those cars—even if the whistle was hardly thunderlike. I went over to the library and looked up The Thunderer. You know what I found in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*? It was a name given to the London *Times* in the middle of the last century in allusion to the writing style of one Edward Sterling. You might say Edward Sterling was The Thunderer then and now."

Leopold was on guard for a sudden movement, but when it came the swiftness of it still took him by surprise. Sterling hurled himself forward, shouldering Leopold aside like a football lineman. "You're not framing me for this!" he shouted. Falling, Leopold made a grab for him, catching a handful of pantleg and then his foot. He couldn't hang on, but as he let go he saw Sterling hobble off balance and then go down.

Leopold rolled over and pulled the revolver from his belt holster. "Freeze right there or you're a dead man," he warned. He raised the pistol and fired a shot into the air. Fletcher had been waiting down the road in his car, and that would bring him.

"Don't shoot!" Sterling whined. "I'm not moving."

"Get up slowly and start walking. Hands behind your neck."

Danny Andrews came into view, with Fletcher behind him. "What's happening?"

"Sorry, Danny. We're taking your partner in for questioning in The Thunderer killings. Read him his rights, Fletcher."

"I didn't do it," Sterling insisted wildly. "You're making a big mistake."

"You sure you got this right?" Danny asked. "I can't believe Ed could harm anyone."

"Tell me something. Did he leave here at any time this afternoon? Specifically, did you notice him go into that back lot at the rear of the property?"

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Danny glanced at Ed Sterling, who was being handcuffed by Fletcher. "I didn't see him, but I was away on this tow job. I just got back."

Leopold motioned to Fletcher. "Take him downtown. Danny and I are going to have a look at that back lot."

They rode in the tow truck, bouncing along a darkened dirt road. Danny Andrews turned on his spotlight as they approached the embankment. "What are we looking for?"

"A plastic trash bag. Chances are he moved it already."

"What's that over there?" Danny asked, turning the spotlight slightly to zero in on something shiny.

Leopold hopped down from the truck and ran over to examine their find. The plastic bag had been slit open on one side and some of the cut-up newspapers were strewn about on the ground.

Danny walked over to join Leopold. "It looks as if he didn't like what he found."

Leopold felt a knot growing in his stomach. "Danny?"

"Yeah?"

"How'd you know when to turn on your spotlight just now? I hadn't told you I expected to find the trash bag on the embankment."

The young man shrugged. "Just luck, I guess."

"Danny, I made a big mistake figuring Ed Sterling had to be the one who rigged up those remote-control death traps in the car phones. Sure, he installed the phones, but he couldn't be the killer. I saw one of those things in action. The needle was sticking an inch and a half out of the earpiece. You towed Godfrey's car to the police garage after the accident. The technicians couldn't possibly have missed that needle when they checked for fingerprints, because the telephone receiver would have been one of the first places they looked."

"What needle is that, Captain? I don't know what you're talking about."

"It was you, Danny. Tampering with those telephones after Sterling installed them, signing the letters The Thunderer because you figured sooner or later someone would come up with the name of Edward Sterling, just as you did in one of those British histories you're always reading. And removing your deadly device when you were called to tow away the cars. Who was in a better position to do it, after all? You'd climb behind the wheel to check the brake and steering before you started your tow, and it only took seconds to unscrew the receiver earpiece to remove the device."

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"Why would I do that? For the money?"

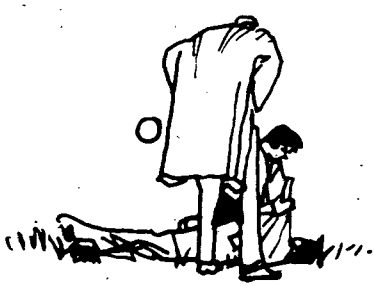
"Any money would have been a bonus. Your real target was Ed Sterling. You wanted him framed for the killings and sent away, probably so you could get his share of the business cheap. Maybe there was another reason, too. He has a very good-looking wife."

For some reason that seemed to get to him. He leaned against the side of his tow truck, head down. "You're one smart cop, Captain. After a couple of killings, I was planning to let you find one of those needles in the phone and trace it to Ed. I knew sooner or later some college professor would write a letter to the newspaper about The Thunderer's name being Edward Sterling. If they didn't, I'd have planted the idea myself."

"But no extortionist or murderer trying to get away with it would have chosen a name so easily traced back to his own name. That should have told me it was a plot to frame Sterling."

They drove back through the fields in silence and Leopold handcuffed Danny for the ride downtown. "Tell me one thing," he said as he guided him into the car. "Rather than kill two or three innocent people, why didn't you simply rig up one of those devices to kill Ed Sterling?"

Danny shrugged. "I guess because he didn't have a telephone in his car."



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a *NEW* short story by

JUNE THOMSON

"So what's the matter, Terry?"

Ivy laid a hand on his wrist, plump, motherly, comforting. Terry stared down at it and, seeing the rings on her fingers, raised his head, taking in other details about her appearance—the smiling, lipsticked mouth, the heavily powdered cheeks, the gold drop earrings. For a moment his eyes looked into hers. And what eyes he had. They were light-grey, the irises patterned with dark markings like those on a butterfly's wings and with such a dazed expression in the depths of them—of grief or suffering, Ivy wasn't sure—that she was startled.

The next instant he lowered his gaze and said in a low voice, "I don't want to go home. My mum's just died . . ."

MOTHER'S BOY

by JUNE THOMSON

It wasn't easy to guess at first glance that Ivy was a whore. Plump, middle-aged, smiling, she looked more like somebody's favorite aunt.

The young man certainly didn't take her to be on the game. He had come into the back-street pub in Battersea in South London late one Saturday evening in March, about half an hour before closing time, and had difficulty getting served in the crush round the counter. He was the type to get passed over in a crowd, anyway. Not much more than twenty, he was thin and nondescript in a shabby denim jacket and jeans, with fine light-brown hair and one of those pale, bony faces which is soon forgotten.

He emerged at last from the crowd, holding his half pint of lager,

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and looked round the bar. Ivy's table was empty—apart from Ivy herself, that is—the other occupant having left a few minutes earlier, and the young man, glancing about for somewhere to sit down, saw only a spare chair and a comfortable-looking woman in her fifties, respectably dressed in a navy coat and a blue-and-white flowered dress, her short wavy hair turning grey.

"This one taken?" he asked, indicating the empty chair.

His voice was young—a little high-pitched and nervous, as if he wasn't used to talking even to middle-aged women in public houses.

"No, dear, it's free," Ivy said, moving her gin-and-orange along a couple of inches to make room for his glass.

She spoke indulgently, thinking that he looked half starved, like a picture of one of those stray dogs you see in an RSPCA advert appealing for funds. He sat down, keeping his face averted so that she could see only his profile, with its peaky nose and one high cheekbone where a tiny muscle kept beating out a little spasmodic tattoo just underneath the skin.

He's a bundle of nerves, Ivy thought.

"Have a crisp," she said out loud, rustling the bag and pushing it toward him.

He started visibly, twisting round to look at her, the corner of his mouth jerking. "Go on, have a crisp," she repeated. "They're cheese-and-onion."

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks very much." He took two, pushing them quickly into his mouth.

"Take the lot," Ivy told him. "I shan't eat any more. I wanted peanuts but Joe's run out." She nodded toward the bar, indicating her familiarity both with it and the man serving behind it. "You're not from round here?"

"No," he said.

"I thought not," Ivy replied. She seemed pleased to be proved right. "It's generally regulars who come in here and I haven't seen your face before. I know most of the customers by sight. Where are you from then?"

"Fulham," the young man said. He seemed reluctant to talk about himself, although he was tucking into the crisps eagerly enough.

"Fulham?" Ivy asked disbelievingly—as if Fulham were on the other side of the world, not just a few miles away in North London. "So what are you doing down this way?"

The young man licked a finger and began picking up the crumbs

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from the bottom of the crisp bag. He shrugged, lifting his thin high shoulders even higher. "I dunno really. I wanted a walk."

"A *walk!*" Ivy sounded more incredulous. "You could have come on a number 49 bus."

"I didn't fancy the bus," the young man replied, his face taking on a somber, troubled look.

"Something up, dear?" Ivy asked. She'd known enough men in her time to recognize the expression. It usually meant they were in need of consolation—which was good for trade. "What's your name?"

"Terry."

"Terry. That's nice. So what's the matter, Terry?" She laid a hand on his wrist, plump, motherly, comforting. Terry stared down at it and, seeing the rings on her fingers, raised his head, taking in other details about her appearance—the smiling, lipsticked mouth, the heavily powdered cheeks, the gold drop earrings. For a moment his eyes looked into hers. And what eyes he had. They were light-grey, the irises patterned with dark markings like those on a butterfly's wings and with such a dazed expression in the depths of them—of grief or suffering, Ivy wasn't sure—that she was startled.

The next instant he had lowered his gaze and said in a low voice, his mouth actually trembling as he spoke, "I don't want to go home. My mum's just died."

Ivy patted his hand as it lay under hers and put on a suitably grieved expression, not entirely feigned. She was still taken aback by the misery she had seen in that grey glance. "Oh, Terry, I *am* sorry. When did it happen?"

"This morning. I've been walking about ever since."

"It's the shock," Ivy said.

"Yeah," he agreed.

"You'll miss her, I shouldn't wonder."

As she said it, Ivy glanced quickly round the bar to see if anyone was witnessing the little scene. She didn't want to be made to look a fool by getting stuck with a young man who might do something embarrassing like bursting into tears—although he seemed numb rather than hysterical.

"Yes, I shall," he said quietly.

Ivy turned back to him, reassured that his behavior wasn't attracting anyone's attention. "I expect you were close, you and your mum."

He looked the type who might be a bit of a mother's boy—immature, unsure of himself, used to having someone else take care of him.

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She knew Fulham slightly and imagined the pair of them living in one of the little terrace houses down a side street, his mother, a bit like him, small and thin but much more energetic, seeing to his food and ironing his shirts and fussing round after him. "Been ill for some time, had she?" Ivy asked.

She assumed that's what had happened. It would account for his neglected appearance. With his mum poorly and no one to take proper care of him, to cook his meals or do his washing, it was no wonder he looked so pathetic and half starved.

"No," he said. "She was all right till this morning."

Ivy pulled a sympathetic face. "It's worse when it's sudden, isn't it? It doesn't give you any time to prepare for the shock. *My* mum went like that. Dropped dead at the sink. It was her heart." It wasn't true, but she offered the story as a form of solace and because, given the choice, that's how she'd like to go herself—quick and clean, no suffering. "I suppose they'll have taken her to Fulham General."

For the first time, he showed an emotional reaction. Pulling his hand from under hers, he said, "I don't want to talk about it."

Ivy could understand his reluctance. She hated hospitals herself, all those echoing corridors and high white beds. Just the smell of them was enough to turn her stomach. It also explained why he was walking about the streets—he was trying to come to terms with the shock before going back home to an empty house.

"It's all right, dear," Ivy said. "I only thought it might help."

He had turned his face away again, presenting his thin, young profile. Ivy studied it speculatively in silence for a moment before making up her mind. "You can come back with me for the night if you like," she said. She made the offer in a casual voice—kindly, but leaving the decision to him. Boys like him—and he wasn't much more than a kid—weren't usually her line. But she hadn't struck it lucky so far that evening, her only other potential customer having turned her down and left shortly before Terry had taken his place at the table. And she didn't fancy hanging about the streets looking for another client, not on a cold wet March night. She wondered if he'd ever been with a woman. Probably not, she decided. Well, she was easy either way. If he just wanted somewhere to spend the night, she'd take him in. He could always kip down on the sofa.

He didn't reply—although Ivy saw his shoulders give a funny little twitch as if a shudder had passed through him—and she realized she'd have to make the running herself, after all. "How much money have you got on you, dear?" she asked.

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Reaching into the inside pocket of his jacket, he took out a wallet, as thin and shabby as himself, and handed it to her silently. Opening it, she saw there was twenty-five quid in crumpled five-pound notes—and something else tucked into one corner. Two rings—one a plain gold wedding band, the other an engagement ring with a cluster of small diamonds—neither worth very much in Ivy's estimation.

"Your mum's?" she asked.

He nodded dumbly, watching as Ivy put them back inside the wallet, together with two of the notes.

Poor kid, she thought. No doubt he'd been given them at the hospital after his mum died and he'd put them into his wallet for safekeeping—little mementos he'd probably cherish for the rest of his life.

Leaning forward to distract his attention from the rings, she said, showing him the three five-pound notes she was holding in her hand, "Look, I'm taking fifteen quid. That'll cover what you'll owe me and still leave you ten. You can stay all night but you'll have to be out by eight tomorrow morning. I can't have you hanging about the place. All right?" He nodded again with a childlike acceptance that made Ivy wonder if he wasn't a bit soft in the head and she felt obliged to add, "It's less than I usually charge, so really I'm doing you a favor. You'd have to pay as much, if not more, if you went to a hotel. Come on—finish up your drink and we'll get off. I'll treat you to a fish-and-chip supper on the way home."

She swallowed down the last of her gin-and-orange and stood watching while he took a few gulps at his half pint of lager, which he hadn't so far touched, his adam's apple straining in his throat. "Come on," Ivy said impatiently. It was nearly closing time and she wanted to be out of the place before the bar emptied, self-conscious about being seen with anyone as young as him.

Outside it was raining, a fine cold misty drizzle that had turned the pavements black. Ivy took his arm, trying to make the occasion a little jollier.

"You'll be all right with me, dear," she told him. "I've got a nice place—really cosy. You'll be as snug as a bug in a rug."

His arm under hers was as rigid and unyielding as a stick.

Oh, God, Ivy thought, him and his misery. She began to regret having propositioned him.

He didn't even cheer up at the sight of the fish-and-chip shop on

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the corner of Weller Street, with its bright fluorescent lighting and hanging baskets of plastic ferns. As they drew near it, he hung back.

"Don't you want to come in with me?" Ivy asked.

"I'd rather wait outside," he said.

"Please yourself. What'll you have? Skate or cod?"

"I don't mind," he said.

Ivy came close to losing her temper.

"Look, dear, why don't you choose? You're a big boy now. You've got to get used to thinking for yourself."

Implying that, with his mother dead, it was about time he learned to make his own decisions.

"Cod, then," he said—but hesitatingly, as if the choice was a difficult one.

Ivy went in alone and ordered two cod-and-chips, glancing round as she waited for her change to see where he was—but he had ducked somewhere out of sight.

Coming out of the shop with the warm paper-wrapped parcels in a carrier bag, she found him hanging about a few yards up the road in a darkened doorway. "Oh, there you are," she said. She felt more cheerful. The warm interior of the fish-and-chip shop with its heavily flavored steam and busy frying sounds had put her in better spirits. She took his arm again, passing him the carrier bag. "Here—you can take this for me, Terry. We haven't got far to go now." She squeezed his arm, pleased at the prospect of getting home, of lighting the gas fire and taking her shoes off. And even he'd be company, better than nobody.

The flat was over a greengrocer's shop, with its own separate side-entrance. Ivy unlocked the street door and led the way up the steep stairs to the upper landing where she let them both in.

"Sorry about the mess," she said, but not really meaning it, as she went ahead into the sitting room to switch on the lights and draw the curtains. She had meant to have a tidy-up before she went out but hadn't got round to it. Anyway, she preferred the place to have a comfortable, cluttered look, and with the gas fire on the room was bright with its orange glow. With the rosy reflections from the pink-shaded lamps, it didn't look too bad.

He had paused in the doorway and was looking about him with interest, almost animated for once, as if he found the room familiar.

Seeing his expression, Ivy said, "Just like home."

Although she had meant it only lightly as a general comment, she

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regretted the remark as soon as she made it. His face—which had brightened up momentarily—closed over again, reassuming that dark, brooding expression. "Well, come in," she went on briskly to cover up her mistake, "don't just stand there like a dummy. Sit down. I'll put the fish and chips out. We'll eat them on our laps, shall we?"

The flat was small enough for her to go on talking to him from the kitchen, where she changed into her slippers before laying a tray with plates and cutlery and unwrapping their suppers. By putting her head round the door, she could see him, too. He hadn't sat down, after all, but was standing in front of the fireplace, looking at her collection of little cut-crystal animals lined up along the mantel shelf.

"Oh, so you've noticed them," she said. "They're my mascots. Every time I have a bit of luck on the horses, I treat myself to one." She carried the tray in. "Do you bet?"

"No," he said.

"It's a mug's game most of the time," Ivy agreed. "All the same, I enjoy a flutter."

"My mum did, too," Terry said. Which surprised Ivy. She hadn't imagined his mother to be the type. She had pictured her being careful with money, pricing up the cost of carrots, watching every penny. But perhaps, like a lot of housewives, she put an occasional small stake on one of the big races, like the National.

"I like that one," he said, touching the little glass owl gently with one finger. "It looks kind."

His expression was so serious as he said it Ivy had to laugh. "Kind? I hadn't thought of it like that before."

He said quickly, "Don't laugh." A little frown had creased the skin between his eyebrows. It made him look older and more serious.

"Sorry," Ivy said, although she was still smiling. "I just thought it a funny thing to say. I got him last year after a bet on a twenty-to-one outsider at Newmarket—made myself forty quid on that race, so I suppose you could say he's been kind. He's certainly lucky. Well, come on, sit down or your supper'll be getting cold."

She patted the sofa beside her and he took his place obediently, accepting the plate she handed to him.

"Eat that up," she said, thinking that his face looked less pinched. There was a little color in the high cheekbones, probably from standing in front of the fire. "Was she ever lucky?" she asked. "Your mum, I mean?"

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This time it was his turn to look amused, a faint smile touching the corners of his mouth as if at a memory that pleased him. "No," he said. "But I was once."

That surprised her. There was nothing funny that she could see in losing and anyway she thought he had said that he never betted—but as he fell silent again, bending his head over his plate to eat, she left it there. He ate like a child, totally absorbed in the act of cutting up his food and lifting it to his mouth.

When he had finished, he laid his knife and fork down neatly side by side and Ivy piled the two dirty plates up on the tray in readiness to take through later to the kitchen before stretching out her legs, her feet crossed comfortably at the ankles.

"My mum used to have slippers like yours," Terry said unexpectedly.

"Did she?" Ivy asked. She felt warm and relaxed, replete with food. Lazily, she contemplated her feet in their comfy blue houseshoes, wriggling them about so that the woolly pompoms on them danced up and down. She hoped he wouldn't start on about his mum again. All that sympathy got a bit boring after a while.

"In fact," Terry continued, "you remind me a bit of her."

"Do I?" Ivy asked, looking pleased despite herself. Coming from him, she took it as a compliment. "In what way?"

"Lots of things. Them slippers. And the fish-and-chip supper."

"That's nice," Ivy said, thinking that it hadn't taken much to get him started. A warm room and a bit of food inside him had made him quite talkative. She wondered how long she'd have to listen to him going on about his mother. She was dying to get off to bed. Still, poor kid, he needed to get it off his chest. "Anything else?"

"Yes," he said. "The mess."

"Mess?" Ivy repeated. She wasn't sure at first that she had heard him right.

"Clothes and stuff left lying about the place," he explained. "Washing-up not done. She used to laugh at what I said like you just did. I hated it. She was always telling me what to do, too. 'Come here. Fetch that. Give us some money.' Just so she could slop about all day in her slippers and bet on the horses. And there was never anything to eat except bloody fish and chips or Chinese takeaways. When she took my last twenty-five quid this morning, I got really angry."

He was leaning forward, fixing her with those light-grey eyes that

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Ivy saw now were not dazed with grief or suffering but with the myopic glaze of madness.

"Look, dear," she said, "I think you ought to go. I'll give you back the fivers I took off you as long as you clear out."

She reached down for her handbag, which was leaning up against the side of the sofa, and didn't see the piece of thin cord he took out of the right-hand pocket of his jacket and whipped round her neck.

When she lay still and quiet, Terry set about his task without any panic, taking the money from her purse and stripping off her rings, which he tucked away with the others in his wallet. That done, he tidied Ivy up, lifting her legs up onto the sofa and resting her slippered feet on one of the cushions.

Last of all, he crossed to the fireplace and, picking up the little kind-faced owl, he looked at it for a moment, running his fingers over its cut-glass contours before putting it into his pocket along with the length of cord. He'd been lucky twice but that was no guarantee. As his mother used to say, it was better to be safe than sorry.

In the doorway, he paused for a last look back at the room with an air of dissatisfaction. It still didn't look quite as he wanted it—and, walking back to the sofa, he picked up the tray of dirty plates and carried it into the kitchen, where he laid it down on the draining-board.

Satisfied at last that everything was in order, he closed the door quietly behind him and went down the stairs.

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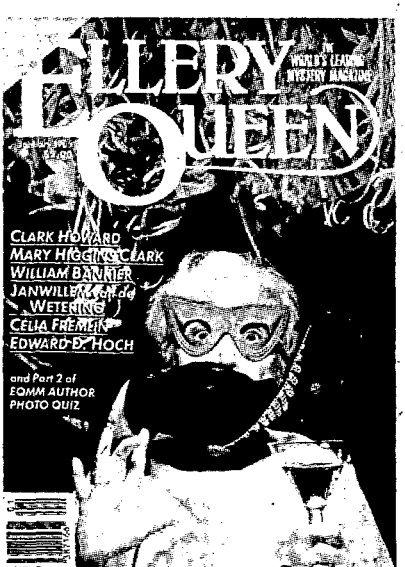

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Wax had caught the madness when his older brother, who was in Salerno during World War II, brought back some venetian glass . . .

THE BOTTLE

by HENRY SLESAR

"We're all madmen, of course," the man named Wax chuckled, his weight on the spindly legs of the Windsor chair making Hausman sweat. He had picked it up at auction only the week before, and while he knew little about antique English furniture he was sure it was circa 1780. If only to protect its fragile structure, he said:

"Would you like to see the collection?"

"Not just yet," his visitor said. He was a large balding man with a broad, ruddy face and humorous eyes with the luster of Favrile glass. In his fifties or early sixties. Hausman had warmed to him the moment he called, but he would have felt puppyish affection for any glass collector who came to his door, especially since gout had afflicted him with enforced solitude.

"I caught the madness when I was still in my twenties," Wax said. "I had an older brother who was in Salerno during World War Two. He brought back some venetian glass, *latticinio*, a *vetro di trina* vase, discovered in a bombed-out monastery, miraculously unbroken. He 'liberated' the pieces—that was the word they used in those days. In the greedy hope that they were valuable, I went to the library and borrowed some books on the subject of glassmaking. Before I knew what was happening, I was hooked." His eyes gleamed in the firelight. "But I didn't come here to talk about myself. I came on behalf of my nephew."

"Who?" Hausman said blankly.

"My nephew Levi," Wax said. "The detective."

Hausman couldn't tolerate the distraction any longer. He pushed himself out of the settee and hopped on one leg to the wing chair near the fireplace. "Why don't you sit here?" he said. "You'd be a lot more comfortable."

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Wax thanked him amiably and switched chairs. Hausman offered him something to drink, but Wax postponed that pleasure, too. Obviously, he was too anxious to begin his story, so Hausman struck a listening pose and let him begin.

"It wasn't just a coincidence that Levi got assigned to the Bevaquilla case. When the medical examiner couldn't come up with a precise explanation for Bevaquilla's sudden death, they suspected some hard-to-detect poison. Suicide, probably, since Bevaquilla had that bottle in his attache case. But the lab checked it out and said there wasn't a trace of poison in the bottle—or anything else, for that matter. It was just an empty bottle. But old. Definitely old.

"That was no great surprise, you understand, since it was soon determined that Bevaquilla was one of us madmen. That was where I came in. My nephew Levi asked me to look over Bevaquilla's glass collection and I was only too happy to oblige. Ordinarily, my nieces and nephews—I have no children of my own—look upon me as one more antique in my house. Anyway, he asked me for an estimate of the worth of Bevaquilla's pieces, perhaps because he suspected a profit motive for the murder—if murder is what it was.

"Well, you know how auction prices have been fluctuating lately. But I did the best I could and came up with a figure between forty and fifty thousand. Levi was surprised. Bevaquilla lived in a single-occupancy hotel and had no income he didn't receive from the Welfare Department.

"Then Levi showed me the bottle that was in Bevaquilla's possession when they found his body in the street. I wish I could have brought it with me, but the police won't let material evidence out of their hands. I'll try to describe it as best I can.

"It was made of clear, fairly heavy glass, the inside sort of iridescent the way old medicine bottles often are. It had a cylindrical neck and the body was pressed in a four-sided mold, the seams almost completely removed. The four sides had rectangular frames enclosing relief busts of three men and a woman wearing the attributes of high rank. Above each portrait was a different emblem on an overhanging curved panel. Beneath one of these portraits was a blank space.

"Well, it wasn't hard to identify three of the four—the escutcheons gave them away. The woman was Queen Victoria. One of the men was Napoleon III. Another was Victor Emmanuel, who was later crowned as the First King of Italy. The third man was a sultan of Turkey, judging by the star and crescent moon. If I was going to find

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out where this thing came from, I had to figure out why these four biggies were joined together on one bottle.

"That's when I went to the history books. I learned that there was only one time that these four powers were in alliance: the Crimean War. That meant my sultan was Abdul-Mejid I. But the main question still wasn't answered. Why did the bottle exist in the first place? It was obviously intended for a commercial purpose. Someone wanted to *sell* the contents of that bottle, so they must have had a pretty good reason for making it just this way. The period of the Crimean War was a wild time in European diplomacy. Everything was up for grabs, including control of the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Turkey was at war with Russia, and when she started losing at sea France and Great Britain jumped in on her side.

"The three allies invaded the Crimean peninsula, but it was no picnic. The siege of Sevastapol dragged on for months, with high casualties. But what really made this war unique was that it was the introduction of the war correspondent. The telegraph made it possible to send accounts straight from the front lines, appearing almost immediately in every newspaper in Europe. It was because of all the horror stories thus reported that Florence Nightingale launched her expedition. That's when people first heard about the charge of the Light Brigade, including a chap named Kipling."

Wax mopped his brow and pulled his chair another inch from the fireplace. "Sorry," he said. "I know it sounds like I'm digressing, but please bear with me. Those newspaper stories did have something to do with the bottle, and Bevaquilla's murder.

"You see, wars were very different until then. Armies left home and then returned, victorious or defeated. The folks back home never really got involved until it was all over. But now, modern communication made all the difference. People became increasingly anxious as they got those daily bulletins from the Crimea. They knew what was happening to their sons and brothers and fathers every single day. And when the prospect looked dark, and the allies were facing a tough winter campaign, their anxiety reached the highest possible level.

"So you can imagine what a big thing it was when Victor Emmanuel, then ruler of Sardinia, decided to join the alliance. He landed fifteen thousand Piedmontese troops at Sevastapol, and the emotional impact was terrific—something like the landing of the AEF in Europe some sixty years later. As it turned out, even Sar-

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dinia didn't bring any quick victory, but it was still a shining moment for the folks back home, a moment that deserved commemoration.

"Now I was able to pinpoint the exact date of the bottle. It had to be the year when the fourth man joined the alliance and gave everybody new hope. It was 1855.

"So now I knew when. And I knew why. But I still didn't know the *what*. What had the bottle once contained?

"As I mentioned, there was a blank space on one of the lower panels. That must have been where the label had been affixed. And since it was underneath the portrait of Napoleon III, I decided that both the bottle and its contents were of French origin.

"Well, I knew of only one place in France that could answer the question, the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. I got in touch with the curator, and when he heard the facts I had already determined he was good enough to give me the name of a collector of what they call *bouteilles a sujet*—Nineteenth Century figural bottles. And at last I had my answer.

"The bottle was produced by one of a group of glass houses in the Alpes-Maritimes, in the villages of La Bocca and La Napoule, near Cannes. They were made for the perfume industry centered then, as it is now, around Grasse. The primary product distributed in these bottles was *eau de fleurs d'oranger,* a toilet water made of orange blossoms very much in vogue at the time.

"Of course, the bottle wasn't the only one of its kind. Earlier ones were designed in honor of the marriage of Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie in 1853. There were subsequent variations, enough to excite the interest of a dedicated collector—like Charlie Bevaquilla, for instance. You knew Charlie, didn't you?" Wax had obviously intended to make the question sound casual, but his voice quavered a bit and spoiled the effect.

"Yes," Hausman said, his own voice steady. "I knew old Charlie. But I'm afraid I can't tell you what happened to him."

"Oh, I've pretty much decided what happened to him," Wax said, his amiable smoothness returned. "I haven't told Levi my theory yet. I'd dearly love to present my smart-aleck nephew with the answer all wrapped up in a neat package. You see, I'm convinced that Charles Bevaquilla was a thief, that he was envious of his fellow-collectors, that he was building his own collection by pilfering theirs. —And one of those collectors may have finally realized what was happening. He may have actually caught him in the act and decided on an extreme form of retaliation."

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"My goodness," Hausman said. "You haven't got *my* name on that list of suspects, I hope? As you can see, I'm quite harmless. This foot of mine keeps me a virtual prisoner in my house."

"But you *do* collect these *bouteilles a sujet*, don't you? Several people have told me you have one of the most complete collections in the country, and you do have an occasional visitor like Charlie Bevaquilla. And who knows? Maybe the last time he was here he might have slipped one of your bottles into his attache case just before he left."

"You're not suggesting that I—or someone like me—would take someone's life for a piece of glass?"

"A madman might," Wax said, "when he realized where all his missing pieces had gone over the years. —Well! Speaking of pieces—I'm ready to see the collection. And for that wine you offered!" He rubbed his hands together briskly in a stagy gesture of anticipation.

Hausman showed him into the den where he kept his glass beneath softly focused lamps in the ceiling. The shelves were painted stark white to give his pieces all the advantages of contrast. There was a striking glass goblet with a diamond-point stipple engraving. There were several examples of venetian-type *cristallo*. There were many bottles, some English, some French, some historical flasks from America. Wax was so absorbed in their appreciation that he hardly noticed when Hausman left the den and hopped slowly out of the room.

In the kitchen, he removed a bottle of Madeira from a cupboard and slowly filled a wine glass almost to the rim. Then, from the deepest part of a kitchen drawer, he found the tiny flask containing a fluid almost as ruby-red. He withdrew the stopper carefully and allowed three drops of the substance to fall into the wine. It disappeared so completely there was no need for stirring. He was about to place the concoction on a small tray when he felt Wax's heavy hand on his shoulder. He marveled at the noiseless way the big man had managed to come up behind him.

"What a fine glass," Wax said reverently. "Let me see the stem." He picked it up and spun it slowly under the fluorescent light. "Triple air twist inside. English mid-Eighteenth, isn't it? What a damned shame," he sighed, "to give this to the police, too."

The author wishes to thank his friend Alfred Wolkenberg, whose research on the French bottle inspired this story.

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a *NEW* short story by

LAWRENCE BLOCK

The package tour covered six countries in twenty-two days, but what the tourists did in each, and where and with whom, was strictly up to them. Meet Andrew and Elaine and Harry and Sue. (Remember Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice?) . . .

AS GOOD AS A REST

by LAWRENCE BLOCK

Andrew says the whole point of a vacation is to change your perspective of the world. A change is as good as a rest, he says, and vacations are about change, not rest. If we just wanted a rest, he says, we could stop the mail and disconnect the phone and stay home: that would add up to more of a traditional rest than traipsing all over Europe. Sitting in front of the television set with your feet up, he says, is generally considered to be more restful than climbing the forty-two thousand steps to the top of Notre Dame.

Of course, there aren't forty-two thousand steps, but it did seem like it at the time. We were with the Dattners—by the time we got to Paris the four of us had already buddied up—and Harry kept wondering aloud why the genius who'd built the cathedral hadn't thought to put in an elevator. And Sue, who'd struck me earlier as unlikely to be afraid of anything, turned out to be petrified of heights. There are two staircases at Notre Dame, one going up and one coming down, and to get from one to the other you have to walk along this high ledge. It's really quite wide, even at its narrowest, and the view of the rooftops of Paris is magnificent, but all of this was wasted on Sue, who clung to the rear wall with her eyes clenched shut.

Andrew took her arm and walked her through it, while Harry and

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I looked out at the City of Light. "It's high open spaces that does it to her," he told me. "Yesterday, the Eiffel Tower, no problem, because the space was enclosed. But when it's open she starts getting afraid that she'll get sucked over the side or that she'll get this sudden impulse to jump, and, well, you see what it does to her."

While neither Andrew nor I is troubled by heights, whether open or enclosed, the climb to the top of the cathedral wasn't the sort of thing we'd have done at home, especially since we'd already had a spectacular view of the city the day before from the Eiffel Tower. I'm not mad about walking stairs, but it didn't occur to me to pass up the climb. For that matter, I'm not that mad about walking generally—Andrew says I won't go anywhere without a guaranteed parking space—but it seems to me that I walked from one end of Europe to the other, and didn't mind a bit.

When we weren't walking through streets or up staircases, we were parading through museums. That's hardly a departure for me, but for Andrew it is uncharacteristic behavior in the extreme. Boston's Museum of Fine Arts is one of the best in the country, and it's not twenty minutes from our house. We have a membership, and I go all the time, but it's almost impossible to get Andrew to go.

But in Paris he went to the Louvre, and the Rodin Museum, and that little museum in the 16th arrondissement with the most wonderful collection of Monets. And in London he led the way to the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria and Albert—and in Amsterdam he spent three hours in the Rijksmuseum and hurried us to the Van Gogh Museum first thing the next morning. By the time we got to Madrid, I was museumed out. I knew it was a sin to miss the Prado but I just couldn't face it, and I wound up walking around the city with Harry while my husband dragged Sue through galleries of El Grecos and Goyas and Velasquezes.

"Now that you've discovered museums," I told Andrew, "you may take a different view of the Museum of Fine Arts. There's a show of American landscape painters that'll still be running when we get back—I think you'll like it."

He assured me he was looking forward to it. But you know he never went. Museums are strictly a vacation pleasure for him. He doesn't even want to hear about them when he's at home.

For my part, you'd think I'd have learned by now not to buy clothes when we travel. Of course, it's impossible not to—there are some genuine bargains and some things you couldn't find at home—but

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I almost always wind up buying something that remains unworn in my closet forever after. It seems so right in some foreign capital, but once I get it home I realize it's not me at all, and so it lives out its days on a hanger, a source in turn of fond memories and faint guilt. It's not that I lose judgment when I travel, or become wildly impulsive. It's more that I become a slightly different person in the course of the trip and the clothes I buy for that person aren't always right for the person I am in Boston.

Oh, why am I nattering on like this? You don't have to look in my closet to see how travel changes a person. For heaven's sake, just look at the Dattners.

If we hadn't all been on vacation together, we would never have come to know Harry and Sue, let alone spend so much time with them. We would never have encountered them in the first place—day-to-day living would not have brought them to Boston, or us to Enid, Oklahoma. But even if they'd lived down the street from us, we would never have become close friends at home. To put it as simply as possible, they were not our kind of people.

The package tour we'd booked wasn't one of those escorted ventures in which your every minute is accounted for. It included our charter flights over and back, all our hotel accommodations, and our transportation from one city to the next. We "did" six countries in twenty-two days, but what we did in each, and where and with whom, was strictly up to us. We could have kept to ourselves altogether, and have often done so when traveling, but by the time we checked into our hotel in London the first day we'd made arrangements to join the Dattners that night for dinner, and before we knocked off our after-dinner brandies that night it had been tacitly agreed that we would be a foursome throughout the trip—unless, of course, it turned out that we tired of each other.

"They're a pair," Andrew said that first night, unknotting his tie and giving it a shake before hanging it over the doorknob. "That y'all-come-back accent of hers sounds like syrup flowing over corn cakes."

"She's a little flashy, too," I said. "But that sport jacket of his—"

"I know," Andrew said. "Somewhere, even as we speak, a horse is shivering, his blanket having been transformed into a jacket for Harry."

"And yet there's something about them, isn't there?"

"They're nice people," Andrew said. "Not our kind at all, but what does that matter? We're on a trip. We're ripe for a change . . ."

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In Paris, after a night watching a floorshow at what I'm sure was a rather disreputable little nightclub in Les Halles, I lay in bed while Andrew sat up smoking a last cigarette. "I'm glad we met the Dattners," he said. "This trip would be fun anyway, but they add to it. That joint tonight was a treat, and I'm sure we wouldn't have gone if it hadn't been for them. And do you know something? I don't think *they'd* have gone if it hadn't been for *us*."

"Where would we be without them?" I rolled onto my side. "I know where Sue would be without your helping hand. Up on top of Notre Dame, frozen with fear. Do you suppose that's how the gargoyles got there? Are they nothing but tourists turned to stone?"

"Then you'll never be a gargoyle. You were a long way from petrification whirling around the dance floor tonight."

"Harry's a good dancer. I didn't think he would be, but he's very light on his feet."

"The gun doesn't weigh him down, eh?"

I sat up. "I *thought* he was wearing a gun," I said. "How on earth does he get it past the airport scanners?"

"Undoubtedly by packing it in his luggage and checking it through. He wouldn't need it on the plane—not unless he was planning to divert the flight to Havana."

"I don't think they go to Havana any more. Why would he need it *off* the plane? I suppose tonight he'd feel safer armed. That place was a bit on the rough side."

"He was carrying it at the Tower of London, and in and out of a slew of museums. In fact, I think he carries it all the time except on planes. Most likely he feels naked without it."

"I wonder if he sleeps with it."

"I think he sleeps with her."

"Well, I know *that.*"

"To their mutual pleasure, I shouldn't wonder. Even as you and I."

"Ah," I said.

And, a bit later, he said, "You like them, don't you?"

"Well, of course I do. I don't want to pack them up and take them home to Boston with us, but—"

"You like *him.*"

"Harry? Oh, *I* see what you're getting at."

"Quite."

"And she's attractive, isn't she? You're attracted to her."

"At home I wouldn't look at her twice, but here—"

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"Say no more. That's how I feel about him. That's exactly how I feel about him."

"Do you suppose we'll do anything about it?"

"I don't know. Do you suppose they're having this very conversation two floors below?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. If they *are* having this conversation, and if they had the same silent prelude to this conversation, they're probably feeling very good indeed."

"Mmmmm," I said dreamily. "Even as you and I."

I don't know if the Dattners had that conversation that particular evening, but they certainly had it somewhere along the way. The little tensions and energy currents between the four of us began to build until it seemed almost as though the air were crackling with electricity. More often than not we'd find ourselves pairing off on our walks, Andrew with Sue, Harry with me. I remember one moment when he took my hand crossing the street—I remember the instant but not the street, or even the city—and a little shiver went right through me.

By the time we were in Madrid, with Andrew and Sue trekking through the Prado while Harry and I ate garlicky shrimp and sipped a sweetish white wine in a little cafe on the Plaza Mayor, it was clear what was going to happen. We were almost ready to talk about it.

"I hope they're having a good time," I told Harry. "I just couldn't manage another museum."

"I'm glad we're out here instead," he said, with a wave at the plaza. "But I would have gone to the Prado if you went." And he reached out and covered my hand with his.

"Sue and Andy seem to be getting along pretty good," he said.

Andy! Had anyone else ever called my husband Andy?

"And you and me, we get along all right, don't we?"

"Yes," I said, giving his hand a little squeeze. "Yes, we do."

Andrew and I were up late that night, talking and talking. The next day we flew to Rome. We were all tired our first night there and ate at the restaurant in our hotel rather than venture forth. The food was good, but I wonder if any of us really tasted it?

Andrew insisted that we all drink *grappa* with our coffee. It turned out to be a rather nasty brandy, clear in color and quite powerful. The men had a second round of it. Sue and I had enough work finishing our first.

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Harry held his glass aloft and proposed a toast. "To good friends," he said. "To close friendship with good people." And after everyone had taken a sip he said, "You know, in a couple of days we all go back to the lives we used to lead. Sue and I go back to Oklahoma, you two go back to Boston, Mass. Andy, you go back to your investments business and I'll be doin' what I do. And we got each other's addresses and phone, and we say we'll keep in touch, and maybe we will. But if we do or we don't, either way one thing's sure. The minute we get off that plane at J.F.K., that's when the carriage turns into a pumpkin and the horses go back to bein' mice. You know what I mean?"

Everyone did.

"Anyway," he said, "what me an' Sue were thinkin', we thought there's a whole lot of Rome, a mess of good restaurants, and things to see and places to go. We thought it's silly to have four people all do the same things and go the same places and miss out on all the rest. We thought, you know, after breakfast tomorrow, we'd split up and spend the day separate." He took a breath. "Like Sue and Andy'd team up for the day and, Elaine, you an' me'd be together."

"The way we did in Madrid," somebody said.

"Except I mean for the whole day," Harry said. A light film of perspiration gleamed on his forehead. I looked at his jacket and tried to decide if he was wearing his gun. I'd seen it on our afternoon in Madrid. His jacket had come open and I'd seen the gun, snug in his shoulder holster. "The whole day and then the evening, too. Dinner—and after."

There was a silence which I don't suppose could have lasted nearly as long as it seemed to. Then Andrew said he thought it was a good idea, and Sue agreed, and so did I.

Later, in our hotel room, Andrew assured me that we could back out. "I don't think they have any more experience with this than we do. You saw how nervous Harry was during his little speech. He'd probably be relieved to a certain degree if we did back out."

"Is that what you want to do?"

He thought for a moment. "For my part," he said, "I'd as soon go through with it."

"So would I. My only concern is if it made some difference between us afterward."

"I don't think it will. This is fantasy, you know. It's not the real world. We're not in Boston *or* Oklahoma. We're in Rome, and you know what they say. When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

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"And is this what the Romans do?"

"It's probably what they do when they go to Stockholm," Andrew said.

In the morning, we joined the Dattners for breakfast. Afterward, without anything being said, we paired off as Harry had suggested the night before. He and I walked through a sun-drenched morning to the Spanish Steps, where I bought a bag of crumbs and fed the pigeons. After that—

Oh, what does it matter what came next, what particular tourist things we found to do that day? Suffice it to say that we went interesting places and saw rapturous sights, and everything we did and saw was heightened by anticipation of the evening ahead.

We ate lightly that night, and drank freely but not to excess. The trattoria where we dined wasn't far from our hotel and the night was clear and mild, so we walked back. Harry slipped an arm around my waist. I leaned a little against his shoulder. After we'd walked a way in silence, he said very softly, "Elaine, only if you want to."

"But I do," I heard myself say.

Then he took me in his arms and kissed me.

I ought to recall the night better than I do. We felt love and lust for each other, and sated both appetites. He was gentler than I might have guessed he'd be, and I more abandoned. I could probably remember precisely what happened if I put my mind to it, but I don't think I could make the memory seem real. Because it's as if it happened to someone else. It was vivid at the time, because at the time I truly was the person sharing her bed with Harry. But that person had no existence before or after that European vacation.

There was a moment when I looked up and saw one of Andrew's neckties hanging on the knob of the closet door. It struck me that I should have put the tie away, that it was out of place there. Then I told myself that the tie was where it ought to be, that it was Harry who didn't belong here. And finally I decided that both belonged, my husband's tie and my inappropriate Oklahoma lover. Now both belonged, but in the morning the necktie would remain and Harry would be gone.

As indeed he was. I awakened a little before dawn and was alone in the room. I went back to sleep, and when I next opened my eyes Andrew was in bed beside me. Had they met in the hallway, I won-

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dered? Had they worked out the logistics of this passage in advance? I never asked. I still don't know.

Our last day in Rome, the Dattners went their way and we went ours. Andrew and I got to the Vatican, saw the Colisseum, and wandered here and there, stopping at sidewalk cafes for espresso. We hardly talked about the previous evening, beyond assuring each other that we had enjoyed it, that we were glad it had happened, and that our feelings for one another remained unchanged—deepened, if anything, by virtue of having shared this experience, if it could be said to have been shared.

We joined Harry and Sue for dinner. And in the morning we all rode out to the airport and boarded our flight to New York. I remember looking at the other passengers on the plane, few of whom I'd exchanged more than a couple of sentences with in the course of the past three weeks. There were almost certainly couples among them with whom we had more in common than we had with the Dattners. Had any of them had comparable flings in the course of the trip?

At J.F.K. we all collected our luggage and went through customs and passport control. Then we were off to catch our connecting flight to Boston while Harry and Sue had a four-hour wait for their T.W.A. flight to Tulsa. We said goodbye. The men shook hands while Sue and I embraced. Then Harry and I kissed, and Sue and Andrew kissed. That woman slept with my husband, I thought. And that man—I slept with him. I had the thought that, were I to continue thinking about it, I would start laughing.

Two hours later we were on the ground at Logan, and less than an hour after that we were in our own house.

That weekend Paul and Marilyn Welles came over for dinner and heard a play-by-play account of our three-week vacation—with the exception, of course, of that second-last night in Rome. Paul is a business associate of Andrew's and Marilyn is a woman not unlike me, and I wondered to myself what would happen if we four traded partners for an evening.

But it wouldn't happen and I certainly didn't want it to happen. I found Paul attractive and I know Andrew had always found Marilyn attractive. But such an incident among us wouldn't be appropriate, as it had somehow been apropriate with the Dattners.

I know Andrew was having much the same thoughts. We didn't discuss it afterward, but one knows . . .

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I thought of all of this just last week. Andrew was in a bank in Skokie, Illinois, along with Paul Welles and two other men. One of the tellers managed to hit the silent alarm and the police arrived as they were on their way out. There was some shooting. Paul Welles was wounded superficially, as was one of the policemen. Another of the policemen was killed.

Andrew is quite certain he didn't hit anybody. He fired his gun a couple of times, but he's sure he didn't kill the police officer.

But when he got home we both kept thinking the same thing. It could have been Harry Dattner.

Not literally, because what would an Oklahoma state trooper be doing in Skokie, Illinois? But it might as easily have been the Skokie cop in Europe with us. And it might have been Andrew who shot him—or been shot *by* him, for that matter.

I don't know that I'm explaining this properly. It's all so incredible. That I should have slept with a policeman while my husband was with a policeman's wife. That we had ever become friendly with them in the first place. I have to remind myself, and keep reminding myself, that it all happened overseas. It happened in Europe, and it happened to four other people. We were not ourselves, and Sue and Harry were not themselves. It happened, you see, in another universe altogether, and so, really, it's as if it never happened at all.

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a *NEW* Oscar Monahan story by

ISAK ROMUN

Adele came back to her husband about the time he finished writing the novel now published and on the stand at her side of the bed. They seemed to have worked out whatever it was between them, Sheriff Roche said . . .

THE ROMANTICIST

by ISAK ROMUN

I looked out the window, watched the sky brood from blue to threatening grey, listened to the wind, and saw the trees bend, pull themselves up, and bend again to the wind. I turned around to the ordinariness of the room—its bed, its tables, its chairs, its dresser, its bureau.

Sheriff Roche was examining the bureau, pulling open a drawer at a time, gingerly picking at the contents as if he were sorting knives.

"What are you looking for?"

He said, "A motive."

"Do you need one?"

He turned his face, a mass of hairlines. A concentration of mind seemed to pull them inward. "I'd be happier with one."

It wasn't as if there was a mystery here. She had confessed she killed her husband. She told Roche this and not much more. I was there not just because murder is news but also because the dead man was the successful novelist, Aldrich Mason.

The reporters had come and gone and I was left with Roche. I was hoping to draw together the strands of a mood piece for my paper.

"Here's something," Roche said, removing a letter from an envelope. He passed me the envelope and kept the single sheet of paper,

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the handwriting on it a thin hard scrawl. I examined the envelope. Postmark: Weaver's Lee. Stamp: Indiana "Love." Addressee: Adele, in Chicago. Sender: Aldrich, here in Weaver's Lee. "She left him at least once, then came back. This is what brought her back last time, I suppose." He handed me the sheet.

I put the envelope on the bureau top and read the letter. My memory's good for this kind of detail and the letter, really a note, was short.

My dearest Adele,

Come back. I am nothing without you. I have found that you are so necessary to my being I can't sleep, I can't function, I can't think of anything but my foolishness and cruelty. Forgive me and take pity on me. Take a plane the day you get this, or call me and I'll come up and get you. Whatever, come back.

Enduringly,
Aldi

With distaste, I placed the letter on the bureau on top of the envelope.

"Any ideas, Monahan?" Roche asked.

I had ideas, but I shook my head and stared at the bed. Roche's earlier explanation sounded in my head and I used the words to structure a picture of what happened.

They had been in bed. She was reading an advance copy of his latest novel. The copy now lay on the stand at her side of the bed. I could see her reading, then closing the book, and putting it on the stand, getting up, going to the closet, taking down the revolver she knew he kept there, turning, firing—the weapon rearing back at each discharge but every round finding him—then calling the sheriff's department in town.

"She came back about the time he finished writing that book," Roche said. "They seemed to have worked out whatever it was between them. He had to have her around, I heard, but didn't know how to treat her when she was. I need a breath. Coming?"

I said no, found a chair, and sat down. "Let me stay here a while and see if I can find an article in this."

He said that was all right and went out.

I sat, my mind not on much of anything, waiting for something to work its way into it. My eyes fell on the book. I went over and took it off the bedstand. It fell open to some pages separated by a bookmark, an embroidered job, the names Adele and Aldi inter-

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twined in contrasting colors. I read some words on one of the pages, then put the book down, the bookmark still in place. I went to the window.

The grey had washed out of the sky. The wind was now a breeze—the day might be a good one, after all. I raised the window and saw Roche walking in the garden below.

"Sheriff," I called.

He looked up.

"Will it be first degree?"

"If it's anything, it'll be second," he said. "Her lawyer's working on insanity."

I nodded. "I'm leaving now." I closed the window and started toward the door. Halfway there, I stopped and went to the bedstand, picking up the book, taking the bookmark out, and tucking it away in my inside coat pocket.

"Is that you, Oscar?"

The words startled me. They shouldn't have—I'd heard them plenty of times before—but I could tell I was in for a night of it.

Some years back my sister Maureen showed up on my doorstep. She had a steamer trunk and just about every piece of luggage she and her husband Karl had ever owned. She had come to stay. Karl was dead now and Maureen's last responsibility, Gregg—her son and my godson—was "with the sisters," being well taken care of. Now Maureen could take care of me.

Soon I found my life highly regulated. I was fussed at if I didn't hang up my coat. I had my home office "straightened up" so I didn't know where anything was. And I got the sharp edge of Maureen's tongue when I came in late without calling her.

That last is what started us off. After I got back to the paper, I spent more time than usual doing the Mason piece. By the time I finished my story and handed it in, I decided to have supper and throttle down at the White House, a nearby hangout. It was after ten when I got home and Maureen was waiting up for me, ready to scold me for letting my supper spoil, for worrying her to distraction so she couldn't say her prayers, for running myself into the ground for that newspaper. It became a Sturm und Drang affair. To my surprise and, I'm sure, Maureen's, I asserted myself for once and laid out a few home truths. I'm afraid I went too far because Maureen finally broke away and ran sobbing up to her room. And I felt coldly satisfied with myself.

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The feeling lasted till morning. Before I left for work, I scratched out a note to Maureen telling her we'd have to talk when I got home. The phrase "a new arrangement for you" was somewhere among the words. I put the note on the kitchen table where she'd be sure to see it. Then I went to work.

Before going up to my office, I told Seana, the switchboard operator, if Maureen called to tell her I was out on assignment.

Later that morning, I received word from Sheriff Roche that bail had been approved for Adele Mason. She was free, subject to certain conditions, until the next step in the legal process. I decided to pay another visit to Weaver's Lee.

No one answered my ring. I must have beat her home. To kill time, I looked around the place, wandering into a yard wild with floral life and soft green underfooting. At the very back, on the property's boundary, a creek of respectable size flowed rapidly, swollen by recent rains. Near the creek was a small pergola with a bench in it. I went in and sat down.

My eyes, strained, fastened on the water. I lost myself in it. Then, from behind me, I heard, "Is that you, Oscar?" and was pulled back to the conscious world.

I looked around.

"Hello, Adele."

"It's been a long time," she said.

"Not so awfully long. Chicago. Remember?"

"It *seems* a long time ago. That was a nice piece in the paper. I appreciate the restraint. I suppose it's better to have a friend write that sort of thing."

"I was going to ask to get out of it, but my editor would have assigned it to someone else." Empty seconds ticked by. "I thought you could use a friendly face."

She smiled. I remembered that smile from before: slight, soft, flickering like a flame behind gauze, it fretted the face and made her appear vulnerable.

She came into the pergola and sat beside me, not close but close enough so I could feel her nearness and smell some scent from her, so fine, so thin as to be almost without character. She had a fine face, long-lined, not beautiful, a face lightly weighed with soft hauteur. But there was on the face, too, a flawing, barely perceptible disjointedness, as if it had been taken apart and not put back just right.

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With one hand she brushed quickly at her black hair—the other steadied a book on her lap—the book I'd left back on the bedtable. "You know, I never intended killing him."

"I'm not here for a story."

"And I'm not giving you one, Mr. Friendly Face. At least, I hope I'm not giving you one."

I answered honestly, "You're not."

"Then I'll just tell it." She placed the book on the railing in front of us. "After I came back, I really thought we could patch things up—go back to the way we were when we were younger, before he closeted himself within himself. It was romantic back then, like something in one of his novels. Honestly, I felt like one of his heroines—I wanted to feel that way always.

"Anyway, that night I had reached a page in the book and wanted to mark it so he'd know afterward why I killed myself. That's what I really meant to do, kill myself. I said, 'I need something to keep my place.' He handed me the bookmark without a word, sort of impatient and annoyed as he often was. But I was used to that. What really touched a sensitive spot was giving me that bookmark that way. I had made it and given it to him. It was meant to mark a particular point in our lives when things should have gone all right—you know, when I came back.

"But I shrugged and told myself it didn't matter now. I put the bookmark between those pages, pages 186 and 187, and placed the book on the bedtable so he'd see the bookmark sticking out. After that I got up, put on my slippers and robe, and went to the closet for the gun.

"He had been paying no attention to me, he was busy with some galleys and alternately cursing the editor's judgment and the compositor's errors, but then he looked up and saw me with the gun. He asked me what I was doing and I told him.

"'Then, Oscar, he said, 'Put that gun down and get back in bed, you damn fool, before I take it from you and shoot you myself.' "

She smiled wryly at me as if to say, Can you imagine? "Well," she went on, "I don't know what happened then. I mean, I do know, but I can't remember. The next thing I do remember was that the gun had become very warm. And there was Aldi in the bed, his arms thrown up in front of his face. There were six holes in his chest.

"I thought at first I would look for some more bullets and come out here and do what I had planned to do—I hadn't meant to kill myself in front of him. I actually went looking for bullets, but then

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I saw what I intended was absurd. If he was alive, I wanted to be dead. I wanted to deprive him of whatever it was of me he had to have. But with him dead there was no point. So I called Sheriff Roche."

For some moments we were silent, she sitting slightly forward, staring as if at something in the water. I watched her hands. The right one quivered, the fingers alive. The other gripped the wrist above the moving fingers. I saw that the one hand was steadying the other, the index finger of which fought to pull back repeatedly against an imagined pressure.

I placed one of my hands on her two and they quieted.

"The bookmark's gone," she said. "When I got in just now, I ran upstairs to take it out of the book. That's when I saw you through the window, sitting out here.

"I only wanted him to know, not the whole world. I wanted him to know I'd taken enough. Now I'm afraid Sheriff Roche knows. He must have the bookmark. But why didn't he take the note? I'm sure he read it because it's still on top of the bureau. And why didn't he take the book?"

"Roche doesn't know. He didn't take special note of it. I have the bookmark." I took it from my inside jacket pocket and handed it to her.

She smoothed it out on her lap, passed an index finger over the raised letters, and then threw it from her in a convulsive move. It arced over the railing and fell into the creek.

She turned to me again and now those eyes, still indrawn and contained, were filled with tears. "He didn't need me."

"He said he did. He sent for you."

"That wasn't enough." Her shoulders shook and she threw herself against me. I held her close.

Before the nurse she had hired came and took her back to the house, Adele reached over and picked Mason's book off the pergola railing. "Would you like it?" she asked. "I haven't finished it but I can get another. It's really quite engaging. Aldi would like your opinion, I'm sure."

I took the book and watched as the two of them described a serpentine path back to the house. I thought her lawyer was clever to see in her all I knew was there. The commonwealth's attorney, to break the insanity plea, might call her a damned good actress. And he might be right.

But, then, acting is at least a part of it . . .

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It had started raining before I got back to the city. It was coming down in thick drops and I was wet through before I got inside the *Advance-Indicator* building. In the lobby, I tried to stamp off the worst of the wet.

Seana came out of her cubbyhole and said, "Mr. Monahan, your sister's been trying to get in touch with you."

"If she calls again, tell her I'm in a conference and will be home late."

"She sounded worried."

"Just tell her what I told you."

She gave me a long look.

I went to my office. There, I took off my suitcoat and hung it up, hoping it would be reasonably dry by the time I was ready to leave. I threw Mason's book on my desk and looked out the window. It was still raining hard, a wall of glistening darts, and now the light was going. I hate rain at night. I drew a long breath, sat down at my desk, and opened the book to chapter one.

Hours later, I finished. I turned back to page 186 and saw again the motive Roche had been seeking. No, not the motivation, but the thing that had made it operative. I reread the letter in the text.

> My dearest Marcia,
>
> Come back. I am nothing without you. I have found that you are so necessary to my being I can't sleep, I can't function, I can't think of anything but my foolishness and cruelty. Forgive me and take pity on me. Take a plane the day you get this, or call me and I'll come up and get you. Whatever, come back.
>
> Enduringly,
> John

I closed the book. It was badly written and easy to read. It had the requisite number of sexually explicit scenes. It used only recognizable profanity and used it often. It had everything necessary for commercial success. I shoved it to a corner of my desk, looked at it, and pushed it a little farther. It went over the desk edge into the trash can.

I thought about those two—the gossamer head and the smut merchant, the romanticist and the realist. She must have driven him crazy at times: all that corniness, the lovingly embroidered bookmark, the running away and coming back. I could imagine her talk-

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ing to him about romantic love and living out of books, all expressed to the jejune clichés reminiscent of his prose. No wonder, faced with an existence awash in a bath of chestnuts, he was reduced to snarling indifference. No wonder, when he felt her loss, he dredged up a note of pleading taken word for word from the draft of the novel he was working on. He was capable of manufacturing endless pages of drivel for his readers but couldn't fantasize his life and hers to the extent of penning something original just for her.

Couldn't or wouldn't. People like Aldrich Mason can see, if they care to try, beyond themselves, can shape their styles and responses to accommodate those of others. The Adeles of the world cannot. For them, the clear, regular contours of reality melt away in the glare of their own vision. They can't come to you, you must go to them. If you don't, you can be seen as guilty of the vilest rottenness.

I got up from the desk and felt my coat. It was almost dry. I put it on and went downstairs to the parking lot. The rain had stopped and the clouds were moving off. The moon was visible and so were some stars. I got in the car and started it up with no trouble. The dashboard clock told me eleven-oh-five. I backed out of my space and went home.

"Is that you, Oscar?"

"I'm home, Maureen."

She came from the living room. Normally she would have asked me if I'd seen the hour. Tonight she said, "I kept something hot for you in the oven. You don't have to eat it if you don't like."

"I think something would be good about now," I told her.

But neither of us moved toward the kitchen.

She glanced off, but not before I saw her swollen eyes.

"About last night," she said, lifting her shaking chin to the hall chandelier. "I know I was wrong and I know I have been wrong." Her voice struggled for control. "We never fought that way when we were kids."

She waited—I guess for me to say something. I could have said, We always fought that way when we were kids.

She continued. "We always had fun then."

I nodded, but I couldn't remember all that much fun.

"Why can't it be that way now?" she asked.

I thought to myself, It can never be the way it never was.

I said, "It could."

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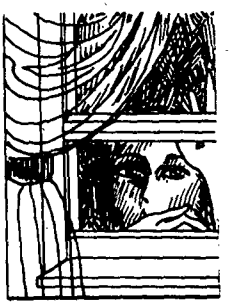
She started snuffling and hid her face in a handkerchief pulled from her apron pocket. "Can I stay, Oscar?" she pleaded. "I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't."

I held out my arms. She came across the hall to me and we put our arms around each other. I was stiff, she was all soft movement and clinging dependence. I said, "As long as I have this house, you have it, too." Muffled sounds came from the face pressed against my chest.

"Come on," I said in a mock-rough voice, "put out that food so I can eat it and get some sleep."



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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"The Australians are at Lord's next week," Reese told Harry. "If I can wangle tickets, will you come?"

"Never get married," Harry said. "If you do, don't have any children . . ."

THE PATERNITY THING

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Showing up at the Kellys' without warning wasn't the way Dan Reese usually behaved. But this hadn't been a typical day: Reese's mind was now more than half made up. The new film, and the role in it he had been waiting for, was never going to happen—so farewell, London. He would fly back to Montreal and let the acting community know he was available for TV, radio, even a stage part if it was interesting enough.

As he parked in the street outside the Kelly residence where Mariette's determination was signaled by tidy rosebushes, Reese blew the horn and waited. He wanted Mariette and Harry—Adam as well if he was around this evening—to see him getting out of this magnificent vehicle.

The front door opened and Mariette showed herself—petite, dressed in something with lacy collar and cuffs, black hair framing the clever face. "Zut, alors!" she called. "Where did you get the limo?"

Harry Kelly appeared behind her, drink in hand, another dark head but this one traceable to a survivor of the Spanish Armada blown ashore on the coast of Ireland. "Shall I call the police now," he asked as Reese came up the path, "or do you want to take that back to its owner?"

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"It's Michael's car. I snatched his keys from the dresser when he was in the shower and just took off."

"The end of a beautiful friendship," Mariette said.

"No way to treat your director," Harry said.

"Michael's been a proper bastard for a week. I think he may be telling me the project is off and he's tired of me free-loading a room. Very well, I can take a hint."

They went inside and sat in the spacious white room, its atmosphere established by a baby-grand piano in front of French windows, with Mariette's garden looking smugly beautiful outside. "If you'd sleep with Michael Marion instead of just using his apartment as a place to stay," she said, "you wouldn't have any problems." She went to the telephone. "I'm going to try again, he may be there."

"I'd rather sleep with your sister," Reese told her. "That's one of the reasons I'm going back home."

"He won't be there," Harry said abusively. At times he could treat his wife like dirt. It made Reese nervous.

"Did anybody hear what I said? I'm heading back to Montreal. In a few days. This is goodnight, sweethearts."

Mariette stopped dialing, put down the telephone, and came to her accustomed place on the settee beside Reese. Kelly was reclining on the chaise-longue, his head turned away, the pint glass held on his chest. At his wake, they would position a beer thus.

"Forgive us, Dan, we're all turned around here. Adam didn't come home last night."

"Oh, no."

"My fault," Harry said glumly. "We had an argument."

Reese could believe it. He recalled an evening weeks ago, an invited occasion with himself partnering an actress friend, a magnificent dinner served by Mariette, jokes and music pumped along by a very acceptable supermarket wine. Harry, quite early on, had done his Al Bowly rendition of "Over My Shoulder" and Reese had contributed a little-known blues recorded years ago by Frankie Laine—"Baby All the Time." It was midnight when the party, now in a quiet phase, was interrupted by the front door closing, followed by Adam Kelly's appearance in the entrance to the room. The fifteen-year-old was a blond beauty, risen inches closer to manhood in the last six months, glowing with shyness as he acknowledged the guests with pale-blue-china eyes.

"There's some cheesecake left in the kitchen," Mariette told her son.

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"I'd like to hear some piano after that," Reese had said. Adam's impromptu concerts were a feature of any visit with the Kellys. It was a bonus that came with Françoise Leduc's advice. She told Reese that when he arrived in London, he must look up her sister Mariette, now living in Southfields with her schoolteacher husband. Usually the boy would slide onto the bench and spin out "Für Elise" or one of Chopin's mazurkas. Lately he had discovered Fats Waller and could convulse the room with a loping attack on "Ain't Misbehavin'."

On this occasion, though, there was to be no joy. "Do you realize what time it is?" Harry's voice that night had conveyed enough hatred to make a rapist drop the knife. "Orchestra rehearsal ends at ten."

"We went to Gary's," Adam whispered. His part in this script called for rabbit.

"It takes half an hour from Putney Conservatory and ten minutes to get home from Gary's."

"Go and finish the cheesecake," Mariette said. "Then come back and play for us before you go to bed."

That was the melodrama of several weeks ago. Tonight the Kellys seemed to be performing tragedy. "Have you told the police he's missing?" Reese asked.

"Not yet," Mariette said. "Harry says they don't want to know about teenagers for at least a couple of days. So many disappear and then come back of their own accord."

"He'll come back," Reese said. "He'll show up hungry before I drive away tonight in my stolen car."

To change the subject, to lighten the atmosphere, Reese talked about Montreal. "This time next week I'll be dancing with Françoise at the Bonaventure. Maybe I'll be auditioning at the new Mountain Playhouse. I hear they're going to do *Death of a Salesman*. Do you see me as Willie Loman?"

"No chance," Harry said. "You'd have to be well liked."

"I heard some gossip from Montreal," Reese went on. "Simon Kristenson's TV show has been dropped."

Mariette sipped wine and didn't raise her eyes. "Oh, dear."

"Who he?"

"Hasn't your wife ever told you about Kristenson? Surely you met him when you were in Montreal." Fifteen years ago, Kelly had spent a month attending a teachers' conference at a resort in the Laurentiens. Françoise Leduc was acting in some dramatizations that were part of the course and so was Reese. Her sister Mariette was hanging

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around, she met Kelly, they clicked, and only a brief time was required for her to accept his proposal of marriage and the life of a schoolteacher's wife in South London.

"Harry never heard of Kristenson," Mariette said. "Simon wasn't as famous then."

"Well, he's lost his big show—five afternoons a week on network television. *Dr. Wellbank's Diary*. They've cancelled it."

"Bad ratings?"

"Partly," Reese said. "When Michael told me, he was being waspish, so the facts suffered. I gathered Kristenson's behavior has become unpredictable."

"He always was a bit extreme, I believe," Mariette said.

Reese let a few seconds of silence build. "Enough of our Montreal gossip. Come into the garden, Kelly, for the black-bat night has flown."

"No more to drink for this one," Harry said. But he got to his feet, stretching and sighing.

"We're going to talk the sport of cricket," Reese told Mariette as Harry opened the French window, "so consider yourself spared." Outside with the blooms and foliage, he took a swallow of wine and said, "The Expos are on a nine-game losing streak. I must get back to the stadium."

"Baseball," Harry sneered. "We call it 'rounders' and it's played on the beach by girls." But his heart wasn't in the teasing.

Reese tried again. "The Australians are at Lord's next week. If I can wangle tickets, will you come?"

"Never get married," Harry said. "If you do, don't have any children."

"Stop it."

"It's possible *I* don't have one."

"One what?"

"Adam looks nothing like me. And the musical talent. I can carry a tune and so can Mariette, but neither of us could ever play an instrument. Where did our young Mozart come from? He was playing the piano age six—so good, we couldn't ignore it. Now he takes two-thirds music, one third regular curriculum at Putney. Plays violin in the orchestra. I mean, what?"

"You must be joking, mate. Genetic material can skip a generation. Nobody knows where a sparkler like Adam comes from."

"On the other hand, he may not be my son."

"Madness. Shut up, Harry."

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"I've been losing my temper with him lately. You probably haven't noticed."

"Fifteen is a tough age for a father to cope with. Palace revolution, man."

"It's worse than that," Kelly said. He finished his beer. "I can't say more, but take my word for it. One way or another, I believe Adam and I have come to the end of the road."

The telephone rang inside. Mariette's voice carried across the quiet night. "Yes?" Mounting panic. "God, oh God, oh God! Harry!"

Kelly stood looking away from the house for what seemed to Reese a very long time. Then he turned and plodded inside, and Reese followed him. When Harry took the telephone and began listening, Reese caught hold of Mariette and helped her to the settee.

"He's dead, Dan. Adam is dead. Oh, Jesus, help me. They found his body on the heath. Dead since last night." When he drew her head against his shoulder, she pulled away and held out two fists, clenched white, vibrating.

Reese spoke mostly to himself. "What can I say?"

"Yes, I'll come," Harry said. He put down the telephone. "I have to go and identify the body. It's him, but he has to be identified."

"Can I drive you there?"

"I'll go on my bike." Each morning, Kelly pedaled the three-mile distance to the school, keeping fit, saving petrol, not polluting the atmosphere.

"Your bike is broken," Mariette said, speaking so savagely Reese drew away from her. "Remember, Harry? You had an accident."

"She's right," Kelly said. "I'll take that lift, Dan. Let's go."

In the car, heading for St. John's Hospital, Reese listened to all the silence he could take, then said, "Do you want to tell me what's going on?"

"Does it show?"

"In the garden, you tell me Adam may not be your son, and in so many words you say you've come to the end of the road. Then Mariette reminds you there was an accident involving your bike. And there was a lot more she wasn't saying."

"Okay." Kelly turned his face away. "I think I killed him. I'm pretty sure I killed the boy."

Reese thought the best response was to laugh at this revelation. So he did, pushing it out from the diaphragm the way they teach you in drama class to produce laughter when there is nothing funny

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going on. He guided the extravagant car around a corner while motorists and pedestrians stopped and watched. "What happened?"

"Last night. Around eight o'clock I told Mariette I was going for a pint and I got on my bicycle—but instead I wheeled over to the Conservatory to wait for Adam to come out." Kelly waited for a reaction. Reese's silence was enough. "I know, it's crazy behavior. I couldn't help it. He's changed, he grew up—he isn't that little angel any more, playing the piano for us and being exactly what we want him to be. He's this big randy guy with— You should see the girls who come around to the house. They're queuing up after him and he wanders away with them, hardly practices the piano at all. The time we've invested in his training. Do you know how much we paid for that baby grand? He says he finishes rehearsals and then goes to Gary's house to watch videos, but I checked up with Gary's parents. He isn't there. Where is he? He's off in the woods with these little women. You should see them, Dan—they're miniatures of their mothers."

"Harry. Listen, Harry—don't you remember? What happened, weren't you ever that age? Can't you recall the feeling of being fifteen and the girls floating around?"

"In Huddersfield? Yes, I remember. You've heard me on that subject."

One night, months ago, with no more songs to sing and no more wine to drink, they had moved on to coffee and brandy and the truth about their origins. Kelly's growing years had emerged as a scene from the last century. Heavy discipline, mum pregnant most of the time, father with a license to drink excessively and punch the head of anybody within reach. Then work after school to bring money into the house. And the escape to London, age twenty, with the irresponsible years Reese had been describing lost in the dour struggle to become a man.

"It's all academic, anyway," Kelly continued as they approached the hospital. "I may have killed him."

"May have?"

"I'd been drinking at home before I went over to the Conservatory. So I wasn't as steady as I should have been. He came out and it was as I thought—he and another lad and some girls. The kids wandered off as I approached, and Adam—well, you should have seen his face."

"I saw it. That night when he came in late."

"That was in company. When it's just me and him, he knows how to respond. He asked me what the hell I thought I was doing and

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I told him to watch his mouth. It was crazy. I knew it was crazy, but we went on slating each other."

"Sounds like people letting off steam."

"I hit him. We'd gone off into a wooded area away from the road. Something was said and I let him have it. I punched him, Dan. I knocked him down."

They were in the hospital parking lot. Reese switched off and they sat there, splendid in the front seat of Michael Marion's limousine. Adam Kelly was dead in the morgue somewhere within the shabby confines of this National Health Service establishment. "There's quite a separation between punching your son and him showing up dead. Did you have a gun with you?"

"Of course not."

"Then how did it happen?"

"I don't know. That's the trouble. I don't remember. I remember as far as I've told you. Then the next thing, I showed up at home, brought to the door by a taxi-driver who wanted to be paid. Apparently he found me on the road—I must have fallen off the bicycle and hit my head. Mariette drove me to the clinic for an X-ray this morning. No fracture. I'm all right. Except I don't remember what happened from the time I knocked Adam down to the time the cab-driver came across me in the road."

Reese considered the story. It was possible that this product of Celtic nurturing had beaten his son to death, but he saw no point in saying so. There are bad things done in the world, and there are bad things compounded by foolish behavior afterward. "Listen," he said, "don't tell the police all this stuff."

"They're going to ask me."

"But you don't have to spell it out. Adam is dead. If you killed him, it was passion—and I know you, Kelly. Your remorse could not be intensified by a stretch on the rack, let alone years of confinement."

"I just can't remember."

"So don't try. Not in front of the cops. A confession may unburden your soul, but life must go on. If you tell them what you told me, Mariette is going to spend the next fifteen years visiting you in some prison."

Reese got out of the car and Kelly followed him into the hospital. "I'm not sure I can handle this."

"Does Mariette know? About the fight with Adam, and the bike?"

"Yes."

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Reese had one more bit of advice for Kelly. "Another thing," he said. "Don't tell the police that you suspect Adam was not your son."

On the day after Adam's funeral, a detective named Temple came to interview Reese at Michael Marion's apartment. Michael was burning incense and displaying fat, shaven legs under a judo jacket and was being very charming indeed while offering coffee to the uniformed northern lad who was accompanying Temple on the investigation.

"They're my best friends in London," Reese stated. "I've seen them frequently this past six months. Mrs. Kelly's sister, Françoise, is an actress in Montreal. We go out when I'm home. It was through her I made contact with Mariette Kelly—and Harry. And Adam."

"Are you settled in London permanently?"

"No, I'll be leaving in a week or so. The film I was waiting to play in seems not to be happening."

"Unless," Michael Marion put in, "the Inspector has nine million pounds he'd like to invest. What about the Police Federation Pension Fund?"

The questioning continued and Reese told what he knew, which was not a lot. He kept back what Harry had confessed outside the hospital last night because Kelly was confused from hitting his head when he fell off his bike, so it was nothing worth repeating. Besides, Reese wanted to leave London, not stay around as witness in a murder trial. Most important reason of all, Adam Kelly was dead. If Harry killed him, it was Shakespearean tragedy of the most elemental kind and the situation would not be improved, Reese thought, by locking up the father and leaving the mother to sleep alone. He knew this view would not go down well in Heaven but he decided to face the angels when and if. Meanwhile, his silence was better for those who had to go on living.

"You're good with the police," Michael enthused after the officers had gone away. "We should do something in a courtroom with you in the witness box. I could get Simon Kristenson to play the prosecutor and he could do one of his manic attacks now that he's become available."

"Get the money first," Reese said. "I've already invested six months in one of your dreams."

"You know *nothing* of my dreams," the director said.

"Can I borrow your car?"

"Why not just take it?" He handed over the keys. "No guts? . . ."

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Reese drove to the privacy of a telephone booth and rang Mariette at home. He knew Harry was back at school. When she answered, he said, "If I drive by, will you come with me for a drink?"

She sounded as if she was preoccupied. "Are you in the neighborhood?"

"No, I'm still up in London."

"Give me an hour, Dan."

When he drove down the street, she was waiting outside the house like a nervous tourist with a plane to catch. As they wheeled away, she took a wary look back at the upstairs windows.

"Is it haunted?" Reese asked compassionately.

"Sorry. Where do you want to go?"

"Star and Garter. Let's look at the river." He made the turn that would bring them to Putney Bridge.

"The ghost may never vanish, Mariette," he said. "But you'll learn to live with it."

"Don't start me crying, you bastard."

They took their drinks to a windowseat and watched the cruise boats passing with absurd majesty for such shabby craft. The river was old and Reese found a pompous way of saying so. "King Henry came past here in the Royal Barge," he said, "on his way to Richmond. That very water."

She thought about that, sipping her wine, diverted for the moment. "Not the same water, surely. It flows into the sea, new water all the time."

"Point taken."

"Even the riverbanks are different. They erode. And this wall was not here in Henry's time."

"Why are women so practical? Okay, it isn't the same." Reese's annoyance was genuine. "For all I know, he went to Richmond on a 131 bus."

They talked about Reese's return to Montreal and what he would say to Françoise about the tragedy of Adam. Then he said, "The police interviewed me today. A detective named Temple."

"The one who spoke to us."

"I didn't tell him everything I know."

"What do you mean?" Some of the pain she was feeling evaporated, replaced by a stubborn determination to protect what remained of her family. "They know Harry argued with Adam. He's confessed that. They found his bike with the front wheel twisted. They believe

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he fell and stunned himself. They've spoken to the people who X-rayed him. There's no case against Harry."

"I mean the paternity thing. Harry told me he believes Adam wasn't his son."

Mariette took it in stride. "That's the oldest story in the world. Any dark parents with fair offspring—"

"I deliberately kept it out of my statement to Temple because Harry seemed hung up about it to me. And if the cops knew, they might think it provides motive. At least, they'd come back and question him some more."

She finished her drink and refused a refill. "What do *you* think, Dan. Did Harry do it?"

"I'm not sure."

"Then take it from me," she said, leaning close and tapping the back of his hand with a finger. He realized one beer couldn't have done this, she had been drinking at home. "Harry did not do it—I *know* he didn't do it. A mother knows."

When Reese delivered Mariette home, she began to ask him in but the invitation was so half-hearted he made up an excuse. In fact, he had nothing else to do, and as he drove away he was bitten by suspicion. He made a circuit of the block, approached the street from the other end, and pulled up close to the corner where he had a view of the Kelly house. He only had to wait for ten minutes.

A taxi rolled up from the other direction, stopped, and the driver tooted the horn. Immediately, the front door opened and Mariette hurried down the walk in that most obvious of ways, the flight of a person not wanting to be seen. She was accompanied by a tall, heavy, tanned individual with a shock of golden hair. Even at this impossible distance, Reese could picture the china-blue eyes.

They got into the cab and drove away. Reese gave them a start, then followed as discreetly as he could in a black limousine. He hoped Mariette wouldn't notice, and probably she would not—she would be too busy talking to Adam's father, the brilliant, unpredictable Simon Kristenson.

The taxi made its way through persistent traffic to the West End. Reese kept the boxy black vehicle in sight, almost lost it going through Hyde Park Corner, then made up the difference and drove slowly past as Mariette and Kristenson climbed out and went into the Masefield Hotel on Park Lane. With no hope of finding a big enough parking space, he ended up giving the limo to the doorman

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at a hotel farther up the street, then he walked back and slipped through the revolving door into the glossy, pricey atmosphere of the Masefield.

"Mr. Kristenson's room, please," Reese said across the counter to a man in a formal suit.

The clerk checked a list and reached for a telephone. "I'll see if he's in, sir."

"Tell him Dan Reese. Ask him if he'll come down."

The clerk spoke into the phone, then handed it across the desk. "Mr. Kristenson would like a word with you, sir."

"Dan, how the hell are you?" came Kristenson's voice.

"Troubled, Simon."

"Did your film pack up? I hear Michael can't raise the money."

"Yes, but that isn't my problem."

"What is?"

"You'd better come down and we'll talk in the lobby. Our conversation is not what Mariette Kelly wants to overhear."

"You're a dirty spy," the actor said before he slammed down the phone.

Three minutes later, he emerged from an elevator. The stage was his and he crossed it in effortless strides to join Reese, who was standing near the magazines and tobacco. "Let's go into the bar," Kristenson said.

He ordered drinks and put them on his room tab. He also asked for a cigar, and when the waiter brought it and lit it for him he tipped the astounded flunky five pounds and sat back to fumigate the neighborhood. His eyes were darting everywhere, he was ready to start conversations with strangers. The man was manic.

"You were right to get out of Montreal, Danny. There's nothing there for an actor any more."

"I'm going back," Reese said.

It was as if he hadn't spoken—his lines weren't in Kristenson's script. "You heard about *Dr. Wellbanks' Diary*? They cancelled the show because of an insignificant drop in the ratings. The agency rep is a cretin. I told him so in front of the whole cast—I said, 'Fat fool, you were never born, you were coughed up against a rock and hatched out by the sun.' "

"Simon—"

"I'm doing it this time, Danny boy. I'm taking my act to L.A. Lorne Greene did it. Shatner did it. I'm fed up with pouring heart and soul

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into the Canadian theater and what do you get back at the end of the day? Ten inches of the old Sheffield stainless."

"Will you listen to me, you maniac? We worked together, I know you. What have you done?"

"What do you mean what have I done?"

"Start with fifteen years ago. When I was going out with Françoise Leduc and that guy Harry Kelly came to Montreal for an educational seminar, remember? Dramatized case histories in a chalet in St. Jovite. You and me and Françoise playing roles and her sister Mariette on the fringe, attending the parties."

Mist rose across the china-blue eyes. "Why do you think I'm here?"

"You'd been dating Mariette. We doubled, me and Françoise and you two. Then this Kelly guy took Mariette's fancy. It was some kind of chemical magic. In a matter of weeks he was on his way back to London and she went with him. Remember how surprised we were?"

"She made the baby with me. But she wanted the quiet life with him—go figure out a woman."

"Ancient history, Simon. They were married, she gave birth to Adam. Strength to strength, fifteen years—"

Kristenson ripped the conversation back out of Reese's control. "You and me, Daniel. California. I know an agent who can—"

"I'm not finished." Reese had to pause because his companion had signaled the waiter and more drinks were being delivered. When they were alone again, he went on. "Kelly told me something the other night. He said he believed he wasn't Adam's father."

Kristenson's grin was as mad as Lear. "That's what I told the poor bastard. Before he tried to run away and I knocked him off his bike."

"You were there?"

"At the music school? Of course. I came to London to claim Adam. I realize I can't have Mariette, she's hooked on the quiet life. It's why she fled in the first place."

"And you thought you'd just snatch a boy that age? From his true mother and the father he's grown up with?"

"Not snatch. Persuade." Kristenson was slipping into a practical phase. His delivery became measured. "I flew in last week, stayed out of sight, did some subtle observation. On the night, I watched Kelly meet the boy outside the school and followed them as they went and had their argument on the edge of the trees. I saw Kelly hit him, then drag himself away while Adam went and sat on a bench. I stopped Kelly around the corner and held that pathetic

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bicycle by the handlebars. He was shocked rigid to see me. Yes, I confirmed his fears. I'm not even certain the news bothered him. That potato face went calm—the fear left it. You see that in some people when they hear the awful truth."

"You said you knocked him off his bike."

"He tried to go—said abusive things to me, told me Mariette would cut my throat when she heard I'd come all this way to disturb her son. I ran and kicked the back wheel and he went over the curb ass over teakettle, struck his head." Kristenson began laughing. "They'd pay to watch it in a film. When he didn't move, I went after Adam."

"To kill him?"

"If I can't have my own son," the actor said, "why should they? They're taking everything away from me, Dan. The television series, some things I had going at the playhouse. I could tell you stories about those devious bastards. And now this."

"What do you mean, and now? It was fifteen years ago, and all you did was sleep with the girl."

Harry Kelly appeared in the entrance to the hotel bar, looking out of place in his teacher's suit with a home-knit sweater under the jacket. He saw the people he was looking for.

"I found Adam on a bench. Weeping." Kristenson wept real tears to demonstrate his command of stage techniques. "I told him who I was. Who *he* was. I said this was why his so-called father treated him badly. I wanted him to come away."

"How did he respond to your marvelous invitation?"

"Called me a faggot. Told me to take a hike."

Kelly was standing over the table. "I remembered," he said. "I was in the staff room making tea and it all came back." The teacher shifted his gaze. "Why are you sitting with this one, Dan?"

"Finding out what happened."

"I already know. I phoned home but Mariette wasn't there. I came home in a cab and there was a note. I don't understand, explain it to me. Why would she come out with him?"

"She doesn't know what happened," Reese said. "Cool it, Harry. They used to be friends. Obviously, Mariette doesn't know."

Kristenson got to his feet. When he spoke, he sounded drained. "I have no idea what you two are talking about." He smiled at Reese. "I'll deny whatever you say about this conversation. Alas and lackaday—make my bed soon for I'm weary wi' hunting and feign would lie doon." As he moved away, he couldn't resist adding, "Perhaps Mariette will tuck me in. She was always good at that."

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Before Reese could stop him, Kelly had taken up a glass, smashed it on the edge of the table, and made a lunge for Kristenson with the jagged rim raised like a dagger. Reese caught the lethal arm to be surprised at the strength he was up against.

Waiters moved in and Kelly was restrained.

The big actor had managed to make his exit from the bar. After a hotel security-officer arrived and sorted things out, Reese remembered there was something to be worried about. Mariette was in Kristenson's room. Explaining as briefly as he could, Reese led the detective and Kelly onto an express elevator and off at the actor's floor. They chased each other down a corridor and around a corner, frightened by the sight ahead of them of an open doorway.

Inside, Mariette was sitting on the edge of the bed holding an empty coffee cup in both hands, a room-service tray beside her. She was staring at the casement window which was flung wide, the curtains blowing in. It looked theatrical to Reese.

"He came in like he was shot from a gun," she said. "He went to the window and opened it and he said in that campy voice he sometimes puts on, 'It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done.' Then he laughed and stepped through."

"Were you going someplace with that maniac?" Kelly asked his wife. They were sitting far apart from each other in the back of the limo, being chauffered home by Reese.

"For quite a few days I haven't known what I'm doing."

"For quite a few years."

Reese said quietly over his shoulder, "Shut up, Harry."

As they approached the house on the quiet street in Southfields, Kelly said, "What are we coming here for? There's nothing here."

"Is there anything anywhere else?" his wife asked.

Reese parked and whipped around fast to open their door, ushering the bereaved couple out with flair. Nobody smiled. He joined them at the front door, entered their house behind them, and let himself descend into their mood. "You guys have got a stretch of bad stuff to get through," he said. "It could be a long stretch. But time heals."

"Stop trying, Dan," Mariette said. "The thing keeping us together all these years was Adam." She went to the drinks cabinet. "I may go back to Montreal. I certainly don't intend to stay here. Have a drink with me, Dan. Maybe you can get me on your plane."

Staring into the back garden, looking insignificant beside the grand piano, Kelly began to cry. "Don't leave me," he said.

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Harvey was fascinated by the beautiful Chinese women, the secretaries and shop girls and bar hostesses who moved with such liquid grace in high-heeled shoes and pastel dresses that swirled around them as they walked down Orchard Road at lunch hour. They had such beautiful white smiles and such infectious laughter that Harvey loved watching them as they strolled down the street arm in arm, giggling and talking together. He wanted to make the acquaintance of one of those girls, one with real class, and he needed someplace he could entertain in style.

Lorraine Collins' first published story, "Predators," in the July 1985 issue of EQMM, received a very favorable response from readers. "The Hungry Ghost" is set in Singapore, where the author lived for three years . . .

THE HUNGRY GHOST

by LORRAINE COLLINS

When guys like Harvey come to Singapore they might visit the Raffles Hotel once, because they've all heard of the long bar where the Singapore Sling was invented and they want to sit around in rattan chairs and watch overhead fans turn lazily, stirring up the ripe evening air, just so they know they're in Singapore. But Singapore is really a very modern city, with a lot of modern entertainment, so after a little while they go back uptown, past the six-storey air-conditioned shopping plazas and department stores, to the Shangri-la Hotel and sit and listen to Matthew and the Mandarins in the Peacock Lounge, where they play the latest in country and western music with amplifiers. A good, new, American-type place is what they like. So that's where Harvey was when he first heard of the apartment he could afford to rent, if he was brave enough to do it.

Harvey was a well-logger on an oil rig in Sumatra, but after

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eighteen consecutive days on the rig he got to spend ten days in Singapore, and that's why he wanted the apartment. If he had to stay in the staff house, he couldn't have what he referred to as a social life. Since he was a bachelor again, he wanted to make the acquaintance of some ladies, and since he had always lived in Texas before he came to southeast Asia he was really fascinated by the beautiful Chinese women in Singapore, the secretaries and shop girls and bar hostesses who moved with such liquid grace in high-heeled shoes and pastel dresses that swirled around them as they walked down Orchard Road at lunch hour. They had such beautiful white smiles and such infectious laughter that Harvey loved watching them as they strolled down the street arm in arm, giggling and talking together. He wanted to make the acquaintance of one of those girls, one with real class, and he needed someplace he could entertain in style.

"I've got just the place for you, Harvey," somebody said one night at the Peacock Lounge. There was argument later about who had said it. Whoever it was told him about the flat that was an unbelievable bargain a few blocks from Orchard Road in a high-class building, up on the fifteenth floor so there was a view of the harbor. A terrific place, and going for a third of the rent you'd expect to pay. Just see Wilbur Wong, estate agent. Everybody laughed. They all knew Wilbur Wong.

"What's the catch?" Harvey wanted to know.

"No catch, Harvey!" somebody said, and they all laughed again. But then somebody else, leaning toward Harvey to shout the words over the throb and strum of the music, said, "It's been empty for years, Harvey. It's supposed to be bad luck there. A girl was killed in the place."

When there was a break so they could talk without yelling over the amplifiers, they told Harvey the sad story, one that embarrassed them because it was about a man like them, a foreigner who had seduced and killed a local girl in the apartment three or four years earlier. It was a terrible thing, and caused a lot of bad feelings about foreigners for a while. And according to the local people the place was evil, probably haunted by a "hungry ghost" because the man got away and left town before the body was discovered. And when you leave town in Singapore, you leave the whole country because the island is only twenty-six miles long and eighteen miles wide.

So he got away and the girl's death was unavenged. Nobody would live in the apartment. Foreigners were tempted by it, but they would

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never be able to get any servants, not even a part-time cleaning lady let alone a full-time *amah* to keep house and look after the kids. All of them would be afraid of the hungry ghost; looking for revenge. If the local people would have nothing to do with it, neither could the Americans and British and Dutch. It was a very expensive proposition for Wilbur Wong, who had lost an investment worth half a million Singapore dollars.

"Who was the guy?" Harvey asked, but nobody knew. He was an *ang mah* like them, but that's all they knew. "*Ang mah?* What's that?" Harvey wanted to know.

One of his new pals said, "That's what they call us. It's Chinese for foreigner. Really means 'redhead,' I guess. But you know what, Harvey? You're the first real *ang mah* I've seen over here!" And he reached over to rough up Harvey's curly red hair.

"You don't believe all that bad luck stuff, do you?" Harvey asked, wrinkling his freckled nose, squinting through the cigarette smoke in the dim light.

Of course they didn't, and the thing was, if somebody would live there for a while it wouldn't be bad luck or evil any more. People would forget. Wong would have a good place again to sell or rent, so he was willing to make a real good deal for a year's lease.

When the waitress came by to see how many more Anchor beers they wanted, she leaned over Harvey's shoulder to gather up the empties from the tiny table and Harvey could smell her jasmine perfume. It helped him decide to go see Wong. There had to be a way to rent a place like that, and how could any woman he entertained there know which apartment it was? A big building like that would have thirty or forty flats and he could always say that the one she had heard of, if she had heard the story, was one flight up or one flight down or something like that. Why hadn't anybody thought of that before?

"All new furnishings," Wilbur Wong said when he showed Harvey around the flat. "All redecorated, nothing left over from before. Everything is new." The walls were painted a pale, delicate yellow, Chinese water colors were hung on the walls, and there was a glass-topped coffee table in front of a cane sofa that had red flowered cushions. "Red and yellow—lucky colors!" Wong said. There were two bedrooms, a modern electric kitchen, and the terrazzo floors were covered with oriental carpets—cheap ones made in the factories

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of Hong Kong, but good looking. Wong said the pattern in the carpets was the Chinese good-luck symbol.

"A swimming pool, too," Wong said as they stood on the balcony and Harvey looked down at the turquoise water fifteen floors below. That was when he first saw the Chinese girl. She was in a red bikini, sitting on the edge of the pool dangling her feet in the water, making little ripples move around her. She leaned back, arching her spine in a glamorous pose, and she looked up at him. He was sure she saw him. She smiled.

"Nice view," Wong said, pointing to the skyline.

"It's great," Harvey said. "I think I'll like it."

Wong opened the back door of the apartment and showed him the storage area outside by the concrete fire-escape stairs. It was partly sheltered by the penthouse that jutted out above it and partly open to the sky. "Your private place," Wong said. "More private than the balcony on the front. No one shares this space with you. A good sunbath place, and a fine view from here, too." He pointed over the waist-high concrete wall on the outer side of the stairs. "Down there, the bright lights of Orchard Road."

"Look, I'm convinced," Harvey said. "The price is right. I'll take it."

He just had time to get a key and move his suitcases and cardboard boxes from the staff house when he had to go out to Changi and catch the plane to go back to Sumatra for eighteen days. But it was worth it, knowing he had that place to come back to. He spent a lot of time thinking about the woman by the pool.

When he saw his friends again at the Peacock Lounge, Harvey told them what a swell deal he had, what a terrific place the apartment was, and about the Chinese girl he kept seeing at the pool. He had never liked swimming much, and felt self-conscious in a swimming suit since he was sort of two-toned, white where his skin had been protected by clothing, brown where it wasn't. He tended to get sunburned, so he didn't go around shirtless like a lot of guys did, and he didn't think he looked very sexy hanging around a swimming pool. But he figured he was going to have to spend some time there so he could get acquainted with her. She seemed to be there most mornings, when she usually had the pool to herself.

Since Harvey didn't go to work like other guys in the building, he could sit out on his balcony and watch her, and every now and then she looked up and smiled. Once or twice she waved, but when

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he went downstairs to say hello she was gone. He had the idea she was teasing him, but he wasn't sure, and it wasn't the sort of thing he wanted to ask his pals about.

Finally one night when Harvey came home late and a little drunk from the Peacock Lounge, he looked down from his balcony and saw the girl, but instead of being in a swimming suit she was wearing a clinging red dress, one of those slit up the leg, and she looked more beautiful than ever just sitting down there by the pool all by herself. Harvey got into his swimming suit and put on a Happy Coat and grabbed a towel. He was going to be cool about this.

He went down in the elevator and very casually dropped his towel and robe and plunged quickly into the chlorinated pool and popped up beside her. She winked and laughed. His eyes stung and his hair dripped water into his eyes, but he could still see how beautiful she was, even though he was still more than a little drunk and somewhat woozy.

Somehow, and he was never sure how, Harvey ended up back in his apartment with the girl, who laughed and flirted and seemed to think he was really cute with his two-toned skin. One of the last things he remembered was standing on the back porch, because the girl said she wanted to look at the lights of Orchard Road. He stood there, as well as he could stand by that time, because they had been drinking cognac as the Chinese like to do, and he must have made a pass at her. Well, of course it was what he intended to do, but he wasn't sure whether he ever did it or not. Maybe he did make the pass, and she pushed him away and he fell and hit his head on the concrete wall. That seemed to be what people thought later on when they talked about it in the Peacock Lounge.

Wong's story was that he just decided to go check on Harvey the next afternoon and see how he was getting on, and that when he didn't get any answer he got the Malay guard downstairs to let him in and they made their way out to the back porch and found Harvey there. Of course they weren't surprised, because that was where the girl's body had been found four years earlier—that was where the hungry ghost would leave Harvey for vengeance. Whether he was drunk or had hit his head or whatever, Harvey had lain unconscious in the merciless sun from dawn until almost dark. He was on his back in his swim suit, spread-eagled under the equatorial sun.

Harvey became famous as having the worst case of sunburn in the history of Singapore. They took him to a hospital where he was put

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in an air-conditioned room and treated for mild concussion, dehydration, and sunburn, and everybody in the Peacock Lounge and the Raffles Hotel and up and down Orchard Road talked about the peculiar case of the *ang mah*. Was it vengeance by the hungry ghost or not? Was the flat purified now or not? The foreigner had not been killed, after all, just hurt a little, so did that count as vengeance?

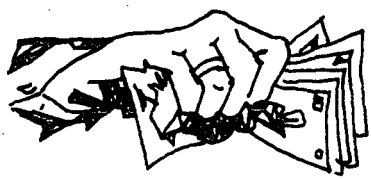
Fortunately, Wilbur Wong could explain it all, and he did.

"Singapore is a very modern city," he explained. "Old ways change. Old ideas change. Even old ideas of vengeance by hungry ghosts."

He said, "Here is an *ang mah* who has only one idea—being attractive to women. But I saw him in the hospital." He could not help laughing, as he described Harvey, sitting there in bed in the hospital, his wild red hair sprouting above the mask of yellow salve that covered his face and body. It was sad, that was true, but very funny. All the nurses and the student nurses, although they were very polite to Harvey when they were near him, broke into hilarious laughter outside his room. Perhaps he heard them. Probably he did. The poor man would never be anything but an object of ridicule to all the women of Singapore so long as he lived there. He was famous and ridiculous at the same time, which is a terrible thing for a man to be.

"That is enough vengeance in the modern day." Wong spoke with great assurance. "The ghost has been laid to rest at last and the property is safe."

Having explained it all satisfactorily, Wong went back out to his semi-detached house on Bukit Timah Road and gathered his family about him—his wife and children, his honored parents, his charming and beautiful sister who was such a wonderful actress—and he toasted them all with the finest cognac in Singapore. He toasted them all—his sister especially, who was willing, for a share of the profits of course, to help regain the value of a flat worth half a million Singapore dollars.



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a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

"I'm a weak woman." Yvette smiled. "I liked the way you held me."

"You keep lying," de Gier said. "That's okay. All suspects lie . . ."

A LAW STUDENT

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Whoever dines at Amsterdam's pricey restaurant, The Plumgarden, set off by palm trees in brass buckets under a cupola ceiling wherein angels make music, whoever enjoys *nouvelle cuisine* dishes there, sprinkled with rare wines, hardly expects the gent at the next table to fall over and die.

The gent was in perfect health just a moment ago, in his tailored Homme de Ville suit. He was about to bite into caviar on fresh toast when his handsome head flopped over. Blood dribbled from his mouth and over he went, sliding slowly off his chair, then falling outright. Was he playacting? Trying to amuse his beautiful lady friend? Had he smeared tomato ketchup on his mouth? Was he about to get up again, laugh, and sip champagne? Or was this a small accident? The gent had chewed on a piece of gravel that somehow got into the caviar and broke a tooth. Being allergic to the taste of blood, he fainted. That's what it was.

Nevertheless, a calamity. The maitre de was about to appear, rightfully upset, to offer sincere apologies and tell the gent that the meal was on the house—and the dentist's bill, too. So sorry, sir.

But why wasn't the gent getting up? Why did he insist on hugging the marble tiles of the floor?

He had been overheard to speak impeccable British just now,

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complete with the slight stutter that Englishmen affect before getting into a sentence and just before finishing it off. Not that he was true British—he was too dark-skinned for that. A Middle Eastern gent he would be, and very handsome for sure. As good-looking as his lady friend. The lady was most attractive indeed, in her loosely fitting jersey and tight Italian skirt. Maybe she was a model.

Well, we have to face it now—the gent is dead. The attempts of the maitre de to revive him by slapping his face gently and coaxing him back with gentle summons stopped as soon as they saw the dark stain on his satin waistcoat. What caused the dark red stain? A bullet. Had the waiter who had been serving the table, the maitre de asks, heard, perhaps, a shot?

"A what?"

The maitre stretched one finger and cocked another. "A bang?"

"No," the waiter said. "I heard a pop." He put a finger in his mouth and pulled it out.

That wasn't much help. Champagne corks have a habit of popping, and in The Plumgarden champagne corks fly about a lot.

The lady never moved. While waiters and the maitre groveled about her dainty feet she nibbled caviar, sipped some champagne. Her slender fingertips arranged her thick blonde hair.

The maitre argued with himself in French, using two voices.

"Is this a murder? *Yes.*"

"Should I call in the—? *You should.*"

He called the cops.

First the cops were uniformed policemen, a little later they were detectives in regular clothes: an older, fatter man with bushy grey hair and a younger, sportier type. They both had kind eyes, pale-blue and dark-brown. The older man should have shaved, the younger man wore a full moustache. The older man's crumpled suit didn't fit him, the younger man's loose jacket was impeccable and his jeans cut to size.

"Who fired the shot?" Adjutant Grijpstra asked sadly, as if he knew nobody knew.

The waiter thought—he wasn't sure at all—that there had been a young, dark man around, with a shaven head. He might have been wearing light-tan trousers and a brown-leather jacket maybe. There had been considerable movement around the waiter's tables at that time. Guests were coming and going. The suspect had walked toward the table and paused. "Pop."

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"Then what did he do?" the younger detective asked. He introduced himself. Rank: sergeant. Name: de Gier.

The waiter looked around. "He must have left."

The maitre felt left out. "You allowed the murderer to leave? While our guest fell into hell?"

Sergeant de Gier liked that expression. He repeated it softly. "Fell into hell." Only bad guys fall into hell. Did the maitre know the guest?

"No."

"So why 'hell'?"

"Or heaven." The maitre raised his hands to defend himself. He dropped his hands again. He himself was innocent, so did he care?

"Yes?" de Gier asked the lady.

"No," the lady whispered. Her voice vibrated—not nervously, but charmingly—while she explained that she, unfortunately, knew nothing at all. She had been looking in her bag, for she was about to sneeze and was in need of her handkerchief, and her sneeze coincided with the pop. But she had seen nothing with the hankie against her eyes. When she did look, her companion had fallen on the floor and was no more.

De Gier squatted next to the corpse. The light-brown skin, the aquiline nose, the noble, dark eyes.

"This Arab," de Gier said, standing again, looking down on the lady, "was your friend?"

Her long eyelashes fluttered. "A mere acquaintance."

"A citizen of what country?"

"Persia?"

"You aren't sure?"

Her lovely neck turned first left, then right.

"Your name?"

She did know her name. "Everts. Mrs. Everts. Call me Yvette."

Adjutant Grijpstra had enough. His heavy hand rested on the maitre's shoulder. "Everybody out now. Tell your guests and waiters to leave."

"Is he unwell?" patrons were asking, nudging each other. "Why is he bleeding?"

"He's dead," the waiters were answering. They knew what was what.

"Make sure they pay first," the maitre whispered fiercely, addressing the staff. Then he apologized loudly to the guests for the inconvenience.

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The waiters carried in coats. "Me, too?" Mrs. Everts asked, getting up.

"No," Grijpstra said crossly. De Gier flicked his lighter. The lady had a cigarette between her fingers and needed a light.

The detectives were quiet. They admired plaster-of-paris angels, full size, sculptured in the domed ceiling, forever raising trumpets, forever not playing a note. Yvette was quiet, too. Then:

"His name was Omar, I think," she said.

"Really," Grijpstra said, smiling. "He takes you out? You're not sure of his name?"

"Did you meet in the street?" de Gier asked. "He whistled? You stopped?"

Mrs. Everts smiled forgivingly. "No. The agency rented me to him. I'm a hostess with an escort service. A man pays and he's got my company for the evening."

"And the night?" de Gier asked.

"And the night."

Grijpstra looked away. He was lighting a cigar. He said, "Bah" to the cigar.

"I disappoint you?" Yvette asked. "You're not aware of the hard facts of life? A woman has to make a living."

"Yak," de Gier said, looking at the adjutant's cigar. "You should change your brand."

"A whore and her pickup," Yvette said softly.

"Paid company," de Gier said. "It's all in the day's work. We can take it, Mrs. Everts." He pointed at the corpse. "But he couldn't, it seems. He fell into hell. If you're a moll, would the bad man be a gangster?"

"I didn't know him," the lady whispered. "He seemed well educated. A businessman. Im- and export perhaps?"

"Sergeant," Grijpstra said gruffly, "don't jump to conclusions." He addressed the lady. "Don't mind him, Miss. We had a hard day." He held up a finger. "Picked up a dead junkie from a houseboat." He held up another finger. "Found an old man three weeks dead in his bed. The neighbors called us. Now this. The sergeant is still young. Maybe he should be in traffic."

Yvette smiled at the sergeant. "It's all right. I like you, anyway."

De Gier went off to phone. When he came back he said, "They'll be here in a minute. Photographers. A doctor. You didn't shoot him, ma'am?"

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"Call me Yvette," the lady said. "These are modern times and we're about the same age. No, I didn't shoot him."

"Can I look in your bag?"

She passed the bag. "I'd rather you didn't."

De Gier's fingers prodded and came up with an object.

"No," Yvette said, "put it back, that's mine. It's needed, I don't want it confiscated."

The sergeant deposited the square heavy wallet in Grijpstra's hands. Grijpstra opened the leather flap. "This is not a wallet, Mrs. Everts, it's a clever hideout for a deadly weapon." He took out the tiny gun. "A Derringer. Small but efficient. Shoots magnum point twenty-two's. If they hit, they kill. Doesn't matter much where they hit."

"It takes two bullets," Yvette said. "They're both there."

Grijpstra opened the gun. "So they are. So they are. Never used it, did you now. Why do you need the weapon, Mrs. Everts?"

"Well," Yvette said. "That's rather a silly question. Aren't I in a risky position while I ply my trade? The agency does attempt to screen the clients, but once in a while I do meet a crazy fellow who likes to play odd games. Then it's nice to know I can defend myself. Or I'm pushed out of a car because I've changed my mind. I don't want to go to the client's hotel room, after all. The man is too drunk or he insists that I share his dope. And once out in a cold dark street, I'm easy prey for muggers. The mugger wants my wallet. I take out the wallet. I kill him with my wallet."

"Have you killed any muggers lately?" de Gier asked.

Yvette smiled. "There could always be a first time."

"Yes," Grijpstra said. "You're under arrest. The charge is carrying an unlicensed firearm. You will be aware that the penalty is severe."

"Never," Yvette said. "Not for me. I'm a welfare mother. You won't put me in jail out of concern for my child. He expects me to come home and make him breakfast. Your superiors won't support the charge."

"Another charge?" de Gier said. "Drawing welfare is illegal if you have other income. So you haven't declared your income as an escort hostess."

"You haven't been reading the papers," Yvette said. "Charges against welfare mothers are usually dropped. Stop threatening me."

The body was photographed. The doctor took a look.

"Yes?" Grijpstra asked.

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"Yes," the doctor said. "Have a nice evening. Bye, now. Toodle-oo."

"Am I still under arrest?" Yvette asked. "The cab drivers are on strike. I can't get out of here." She stretched a long leg. "Not on these high heels."

"Omar drove you here?" Grijpstra asked.

She nodded. "In a rented Mercedes. The car is outside. He was staying at the Hilton. You really plan to lock me up?"

Grijpstra looked at de Gier. "Take care of her. I'll have a look at the car. See you later at the station."

The adjutant stalked off. De Gier offered his arm to the lady. An ambulance driver and his mate dumped the body on a stretcher.

"Why are you driving a wreck?" Yvette asked, sliding into the detectives' ancient VW. "A rustbucket, about to fall apart."

"Beauty is skin-deep," de Gier said. "A faithful soul hides under unpolished dents. Where would you like to go?"

"I thought you were taking me to jail?"

"I thought you have a child at home?" The engine whined to life. "How old is your son?"

"Martin just turned ten. He shouldn't know about this. I live in Luyken Street." She watched the window wipers. "Now it's raining, too."

De Gier found the street. "Number?"

She gave it. "Want to come in for a moment?"

De Gier drove on, looking for a place to park.

"I should have brought my coat," she said. It was raining hard. The wipers had trouble keeping the windscreen clean. "Now I have to slop through puddles. I only bought these shoes today."

De Gier had found a place. "You won't get wet. I'll carry you across the puddles."

He found a rolled-up coat on the back seat. "We're well equipped." He held up the coat. "See? It even has a hood."

Yvette slipped into the coat. De Gier got out and waited for her on the sidewalk. He bent his knees, put one arm across her shoulders and another under her knees, and swooped her up easily.

"Comfortable?"

She giggled from the black depth of the hood. "Oh, yes. You're my hero. I didn't know there were any left. Are you truly a hero?"

"I am," de Gier said. "Quaking in my boots, I fight for fun. I usually lose but I don't care. Perpetual failure is good character training."

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Her head rested against his shoulder. "You waste energy for free?"

He peered into the hood after jumping a puddle. "I do get my wages." He didn't make the next jump as perfectly as planned. "But rewards tend to spoil the game. I accept neither medals nor promotion." He laughed softly. "The cause is lost, the future dim, but aren't we having a good time while we muddle about?"

"That's nice," Yvette said. "When you laugh, your chest rumbles. You have an immense chest. I like it here. Why don't you carry me around the block?"

More water splashed into de Gier's shoes as he carefully put her down. She opened a door that led to a long steep staircase. She looked around. "I'll go first. Promise not to look under my skirt."

There was a landing upstairs and another door, recently and neatly painted, with her name calligraphed in slanting lettering above a shiny antique brass knocker.

Yvette coughed as she reached for the key and fitted it into the lock. "The climb always wears me out." The door swung open. "Step into my nest, handsome sergeant."

De Gier looked around at the Seventeenth Century rosewood set of drawers, a mahogany bookcase, fresh flowers artfully arranged in alabaster vases. "Luxury!" A small boy was watching TV. He got up to shake the visitor's hand.

"Martin," Yvette told de Gier.

"Rinus," de Gier said. "Pleased to meet you, Martin. I had to take your mother home. Bad weather."

Martin kissed his mother. "Where is Omar, Mom? Did something go wrong?"

Yvette stroked his hair. "Omar had to go back to his country. Anything good on television?"

The boy switched off. "No. The news was bad again. Black people dying and an airplane fell down. In the snow somewhere. You could see the broken wings and they say all the people are dead."

"Never watch the news," de Gier said. "I haven't got a TV. It's nice not to know."

"I'll get him a VCR," Yvette said, "with cartoons or something. He doesn't need a social conscience, that's only weight."

"How about a tank full of goldfish?" de Gier suggested. "They're fun to watch." He shook his head. "No. Goldfish feel caught, too. Maybe he should just watch the sky."

"I'll go to bed," Martin said. They wished him good night. He

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shook de Gier's hand again. "Nice to meet you, Rinus. Are you Mom's friend?"

"Yes," de Gier said. "No babysit?" he asked when the door closed.

Yvette checked her watch. "She'll be here in half an hour. Maybe I can still catch her at home. Will that be okay? For me to use the phone?"

"Why not?" de Gier asked, admiring framed prints signed by a known artist. His finger traced the backs of textbooks on a shelf.

Yvette phoned, then turned to de Gier. "Didn't you say I was under arrest? I thought maybe suspects aren't allowed to make phonecalls."

"You're a student?" asked de Gier.

"Yes. I'm almost done. I'll be a lawyer. Care for a drink?"

The bar, hidden in the rosewood cupboard, was well stocked. "Don't you think I'm good? I never graduated from high school, I married stupidly—we both worked in factories for years—then I woke up at last. I'm intelligent. I went back to school and passed all the evening courses. Then I became an escort lady and go to university days. Another few months and I'll have my degree."

De Gier caressed his moustache. "Your husband?"

"He didn't like it. We divorced."

"He doesn't support you?"

She shrugged. "Should he? He needs his money. He married again, he's got new kids and all. I take care of myself."

"And Martin?"

"He sometimes visits his father. I don't mind." She held up a glass. "What will it be, sergeant?"

"Soda, please. I'm working now."

She poured from a chilled can.

"Welfare and the agency," de Gier said. "You're doing well. Why did you say you had only just met Omar?"

She poured a stiff whiskey and gulped it down. "I didn't want to get involved. Omar was my special client. The agency is tough. They insist on being paid even if the relationship becomes more personal. Omar paid them and tipped me. He wallowed in money. He sold Persian oil. I've known him for some months."

"I might not have found out," de Gier said. "Why did you ask me in?"

She smiled. "I'm a weak woman. I liked the way you held me."

"You keep lying," de Gier said. "That's okay. All suspects lie. Now, did you see the killer?"

Yvette flopped down on the couch. "Don't be so serious, Sergeant.

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I saw the man. He squints. He's a Persian, too, I think. The waiter's description was accurate enough. It was all over in a moment. The man seemed to want to pass our table, then stopped and shot Omar. There was something on the gun—a silencer, I suppose."

"Can I phone?" de Gier asked.

"Yes," Grijpstra said. "I checked with the car-rental people and I phoned the hotel. Omar Sarab is the name. He's in the morgue now and I went through his pockets. There was a business letter from the Berg and Company oil firm in Rotterdam. I rose Mr. Berg at his home. My news hardly surprised him. Omar was corrupt, sold oil cheaply if Berg came up with some cash on the side. Lots of cash, I presume. Maybe ten thousand dollars on every deal. Omar couldn't take the money home so he spent it here. Some of it on the lady?"

"Have you ever read the Koran?" de Gier asked.

"What does it say?"

"It describes sobriety," de Gier said. "The simple life here and the good life later in heaven. Persia is run by a priest. The priest is tough."

"He had Omar shot?"

"Just a guess," de Gier said.

"My guess, too," Grijpstra said. "A political murder. Out there religion is political. That leaves us out, Sergeant. I'll type a note to the Secret Service. They can file it. The killer must be on his way out already."

"Not yet, Adjutant. There are no planes at this time of night."

"The case is closed, Sergeant."

"Wait," de Gier said. "I've really read the Koran. It also prescribes hospitality. Hospitality is one of our own virtues, too. Here is a foreigner having dinner in our city and he gets shot. We failed to protect him. I say we do some work."

"Please, Sergeant." Grijpstra sighed. "Admire a job well done. No mess. No innocent parties were hurt. Come here and sign my report. Then we're done, you hear?"

"Sure," de Gier said. "Another virtue is friendship. You're my friend. Just a little project to share. It will only take a couple of short hours. I'll pick you up at the Apollo Boulevard. I have an idea."

"How can I go anywhere if you have the car?"

"Take the streetcar," de Gier said. "A Number Twenty-four. It goes every few minutes. Get off at Beethoven Street and I'll be right along." He put down the phone.

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Yvette's hand rested lightly on the sergeant's sleeve. "Stay out of this, Rinus. Omar knew he was taking risks. Moslems live by their weapons. Your adjutant doesn't want to go. He's right. Phone him back and spend some time with me."

De Gier hesitated. She kissed his chin.

"No," de Gier said.

She pushed his chest with both hands. "Such a perfect knight, wasting time and energy on the wrong cause. Be a true hero. I can help. Travel all over and bags of gold to spend, and when you're here you can be with me."

"I really have to go now," de Gier said.

"You're free, you know," Yvette said. "Think about it. You can do what you like."

Adjutant Grijpstra was wet through, his glistening face only partly protected by his threadbare overcoat's collar. "What happened to you?"

"Unexpected trouble," de Gier said. "I saw a van opening its sliding doors, with hands that came out. Bicycle-thieving hands."

"We're the murder brigade," Grijpstra reminded him. "Will you ever learn minding our business?"

"I thought it would only take a minute." De Gier grinned. "But they were fighting types. I got them down after a bit, but then the patrol car was late."

"Busybody." Grijpstra frowned. "And me getting soaked here. Now what do we do? Can I please go home?"

"See here," de Gier said. "Our hitman, properly motivated, was sent by a high priest, but murder upsets the staunchest of spirits. I theorize that our suspect was shaken. Now what does a shaken Persian do while he waits for the morning and the plane that'll fly him home? Wouldn't he be looking for some comfort? Where would he find that?"

"We're not visiting brothels tonight," Grijpstra said. "I absolutely refuse. Catch your own wild goose."

"He's a devout Moslem, Adjutant, averse to women and wine. I believe he's with his own kind, right this minute. There aren't too many Persians about in Amsterdam, and the few who bless us with their presence gather in a café."

"Where?"

De Gier pointed. "In that side street."

"Hmm."

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"Am I right?"

"You could be," Grijpstra said. "You've been right before. Light-tan trousers? Brown-leather jacket? Dark? Shaven hair?"

"He squints," de Gier said.

"Ah," Grijpstra grumbled. "So the lady did see him." His wet hand patted de Gier's arm. "Rinus, listen. That café will be full of automatics. They may have bazookas. You want to attack with two puny pistols? That's against instructions. We should phone for assistance."

"And not get it," de Gier said. "It takes hours before a SWAT team can get together. What does our very own commissaris say? In a case like this we can never be too fast. The killer is still nervous—he's bound to make mistakes."

Grijpstra dropped his soggy cigar. "Let's go."

De Gier parked the Volkswagen. The café's windows had been covered with sheets of brown paper.

"Not a welcoming place, Sergeant."

"A nasty place," de Gier agreed. "I went in once. They serve goat's leg with the hair still on. The waiters keep rushing away to pray. The Ayatollah watches from the wall."

"Closed!" an unshaven old man shouted. "Go home—this place private!" Grijpstra showed his identification. "Police. Checking your residence permits. And a good evening to you."

The café was crowded. The clients, bearded and fierce-eyed, snarled and gestured. A young man answering the waiter's and Yvette's description slipped through a door to the back.

De Gier ran after him and cornered him in a back room. The suspect reached for his gun—too late, for the sergeant's fist had already hit his jaw. He stumbled. The sergeant shoved and the suspect fell. De Gier knelt on his chest and pulled the pistol from his armpit. "Let's go," de Gier said, getting to his feet and dragging the young man up with him.

In the café, the Persians came forward, shoulder to shoulder. "Police!" Grijpstra shouted, walking backward to the door. "No trouble. Keep quiet. Back to your coffee, have a good time!"

The suspect was pushed onto the Volkswagen's rear seat. De Gier sat next to him. Grijpstra drove the car away from the sidewalk, drying his face with a dirty handkerchief. "I tell you, everyone in there was armed. Must I really work with you? You'll be the death of me, Sergeant."

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De Gier showed Grijpstra the young man's gun. "Proof, Adjutant. We have our man."

"Hurrah," Grijpstra said. "Back to the station. Lock suspect up. Close for the day. I'll buy you a drink."

"How come I always pay?" de Gier asked. "Your invitations are too costly."

Suspect mumbled in Persian.

"English?" de Gier asked.

Suspect mumbled in English. About Duty Done. Things had gone well. Allah was with him. What happened to him now wouldn't matter to him. The folks back home would be proud of him. "Kill me," suspect mumbled. "I'll go to heaven."

"Not yet," de Gier said. "The houris will have to wait a while."

"What are houris?" Grijpstra asked.

"Moslem angels that'll make love to him. Call girls upstairs. —You're better off here," de Gier said to the suspect. "You'll have a rest."

"One idealist catches another," Grijpstra said. "You should let him go, Sergeant. He's your brother in the spirit."

"Let's interrogate him first."

"You think he'll talk?"

"Of course," de Gier said. "His courage is like mine. It evaporates under stress. He'll sing like an egret."

"What's an egret?"

"A Persian bird."

In the detective's office, the suspect sat straight on the edge of his chair, with his arms crossed defensively. "He won't say anything," Grijpstra complained, "and I'm running out of time. Can we go and have that drink now?"

"Allow me," de Gier said. He took a pair of new gloves from a drawer. He put them on slowly, staring at the suspect.

"Now what?" Grijpstra asked.

"These gloves are a birthday present from my sister," de Gier said. "I never thought I'd have a use for them, but the suspect now thinks I'm going to beat him up."

Grijpstra studied the suspect's face. "I'll help you." He lit a fat cigar, sucking furiously so that the tip glowed a sinister red.

"Please," the suspect said. "Don't."

"Name of your boss?" the sergeant snarled. The leather of his gloves creaked. Grijpstra's cigar sparked.

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"Karim."

"Address?"

"Rubens Street." Suspect also supplied the number.

Grijpstra put down his cigar. De Gier took off his gloves. "Doesn't ignorance help? They should instruct their killers better. Don't they know we're the most tolerant cops on earth?" He picked up the phone. "One suspect for the cellblock."

Two uniformed constables came to fetch the killer. "Frisk him," Grijpstra said. "His lighter is a bomb, the clasp of his belt a knife. He's probably hiding poison, too."

"Now," Grijpstra said in the Volkswagen, "this is far as I go. Mr. Karim will have diplomatic status. He'll also be armed, employ bodyguards, and keep dogs. The apartment will be guarded by electronic gadgets. A leopard will jump us when we ring the bell."

"Just one last move," the sergeant said gently. "If there are any complaints, we'll listen to them tomorrow. Today is still today. It'll be nice, Adjutant, a chase in the dark. A challenge, I daresay. Jane lives in the Rubens Street. I'll go through her apartment and attack from the roof."

"Leave Jane out of this," Grijpstra said. "Jane is a street cop, not an assassin like you. That she seems to like you is no reason to risk her dear life."

"You ring the bell," de Gier said. "Kick the door. By now he's warned. He'll escape via the roof. I'll wait for him and make the arrest."

"His finger will be on the trigger of an Uzi machine gun."

"Aimed at me, Adjutant. You'll be safe below."

"And what if he hits you?"

"You'll be rid of me."

"True, true," Grijpstra said. "Enough of this. I promise I'll pay for the drinks. Let's go. I know a nice bar that's still open."

"Rinus," Jane said, "are you out of your mind? Do you know what time it is? Ignore me at the station and visit me here whenever you like? Are you drunk? Are you crazy?"

"Sober," de Gier said. "Working."

Jane stepped back. "You really think I'm available whenever you feel a little hyper?"

"I am," de Gier said, "pursuing a dangerous criminal. I'm sorry

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I have to bother you, but I need to get on the roof. Let me get out through a window. Then go back to bed. I may be a while."

"I'll help."

"No," de Gier said. "It's blowing hard. You might be blown away."

De Gier stood on the windowsill with Jane holding onto his legs. He stretched and grabbed the gutter. His legs swung free. He crawled onto the roof, looked down at the street, and switched on his flashlight. The lights of the parked Volkswagen below blinked. De Gier slithered on wet roof-tiles, averting his face from the cold wind. Grijpstra got out of the car and rung Karim's bell. He stepped aside and waited.

There were clouds and no moon. De Gier stumbled about, ready to give in. Maybe political fanatics can stay cool. The sergeant would give it another minute.

The wind howled but there were also other sounds. A squeaky trapdoor?

Karim hoisted his bulk onto the roof. His fear of heights made him dizzy. It's easy to slip on a wet roof. Where was he?

"Hello?" de Gier shouted.

Karim fired. The bullet whined through the night. Where had the voice come from?

"Drop your pistol!" de Gier shouted. "We have you surrounded! We're also waiting below! You're under arrest—surrender, sir!"

Karim cursed. De Gier cursed, too. They both fired in turn. De Gier missed on purpose. "Drop your gun!" I'm not really a hero, de Gier was thinking. All this frightens me. I hate heights. Here I am, a hundred feet up in a moving sky, confronted by a holy man with Allah on his side. What supports me, except my doubt?

"Mister Karim?"

Karim was portly and no longer young. His son had just been killed in a desert drenched by oil. His other son, a boy, was a prisoner of war. His daughters shuffled about wrapped up in black cloth, with their beautiful eyes, the eyes of their mother, peering innocently through slits. Karim prayed seven times a day. Now he was lost on a heathen roof.

"Yes?"

"Don't be foolish. Drop your gun. Raise your hands."

I've done the right thing, Karim thought. Omar was a traitor. He forgot the revolution. Omar sold his soul. Supreme justice killed him, I was merely a tool.

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Karim fired again.

"Last chance!" de Gier shouted. "I'm counting to three. Then I'll be coming for you!"

No, *please*, Karim prayed. He kept firing until his gun clicked. He fumbled with the new clip. It slipped from his trembling hand. The shadow ahead crept closer. Karim stumbled, fell, tried to roll away. Had Allah come for him? Was he being lifted into heaven? Then why was he falling?

Grijpstra heard Karim's agonized yell rising feebly from the yard behind the apartment building. The adjutant sighed and returned to the car. He picked up the microphone attached to the dashboard.

It took long minutes before a patrol car arrived. De Gier was back in the street by then, standing next to Jane. His teeth chattered.

"Now what have you done?" Jane asked. "I knew that poor Arab. We bought flowers at the same stall. A nice, polite old man. I know his wife, too. I've often helped her with her shopping."

"I'm sorry," de Gier said.

"Well, now," the commissaris said later the next day, "a job well done, I have to agree. Murders should be solved quickly or we lose the thread."

De Gier stared at his trembling hands. Grijpstra stirred his coffee.

"Not that I don't abhor violence," the commissaris said. "It shouldn't be necessary."

"He fell, sir," de Gier said.

"Yes. Quite. Now what about this Mrs. Everts? She's only mentioned in your report. No charges, Sergeant? Are we ignoring an unlicensed, nasty little gun and income that wasn't filed with our tax department? There'll be no action?"

De Gier tried to roll a cigarette. "Sir?" Grijpstra asked. "Should we waste our time? The court doesn't welcome that sort of thing. A welfare mother with a child?"

"A future lawyer," the commissaris said. "Do we need lawyers like that?"

"And the gun," Grijpstra said. "Just a toy in a way. In her present profession, she does need protection. We no longer do a good job. There are muggings galore."

"The citizens arming themselves?" the commissaris asked. He pushed the report away. "Very well. Take a few days off. Take a rest. See you next week." He rubbed his leg.

"How's your rheumatism, sir?"

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The commissaris looked at the rain beating against the window. He nodded. "I'll feel better in the spring."

Yvette phoned. "Am I under arrest or not?"
"Not," Grijpstra said.
"And my Derringer?"
De Gier took the phone. "Will you be home tonight?"
"I'm working."
"Tomorrow?"
"Tomorrow night, too."
"I can't think that far ahead." De Gier put the phone down.

She arrived during the weekend, after telephoning him first. The hairdresser had readjusted her hair modishly, adding just a touch of the latest punk style. Her mohair coat appeared brand new. De Gier helped her out of the coat. She wore a paratrooper's suit underneath, dotted, camouflaged subtly. The ideal apparel for an independent spirit. She paused in de Gier's door, taking in the apartment.

"You *live* here?"

"Sure. You don't like my home?"

"But it's so *small.*"

"It's only for me," de Gier said. "And Tabriz." He picked up the cat. The cat was fat, bald in spots, low on its legs.

"Charming," Yvette said. "I trust she's well tempered?"

"Not really." He put the cat down. Tabriz mumbled to herself, rowing her legs. She shot off to the kitchen. De Gier pointed at the bed, held up by a polished copper frame. "Don't mind its appearance. It's old, but it'll hold you in comfort. I have no chairs. —A cup of tea? I've got some made."

He passed her a cup and the Derringer that he retrieved from a drawer. She opened her bag and dropped the weapon into its welcoming slit. The bag snapped shut. "Thanks."

De Gier bowed. "My pleasure. I oiled it for you. The hinge was quite rusty."

Yvette crossed her long legs. "You live in a cubbyhole. I'm surprised at you, Sergeant, a man of your status. What's that growing on your balcony? Some rare plants?"

"Weeds," de Gier said. "Dug up from a wasteland. I like weeds. They grow flowers in summer and the birds come and pick the seeds

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this time of the year. Sparrows mostly. They hang upside down when they eat."

Yvette waited for him to light her cigarette. "Birds and plants? Sparrows and weeds? You could have peacocks and palm trees. Wouldn't you like that better?"

De Gier thought. "Yes. Why not?"

"You can have all you can imagine." Yvette's hand touched his hair. "That's why I came, to share that truth. The agency is opening up connections from the Middle East through here to the Caribbean Islands. You could live on Aruba, in a villa of your own. The agency needs heroes like you, who will travel."

De Gier looked up. "You're qualified. Why give me the job?"

Yvette pushed out a moist lower lip. "The agency prefers a man. Besides, there's Martin. He needs another six years of care."

"No," de Gier said. "My quest is different, there's no room for greed."

She jumped off the bed and paced the apartment, looking at the books. "You read."

"Sometimes."

She picked up a volume. "In French?"

"Yes," de Gier said. "My French is weak, but it's nice to guess at words, give them my own meaning."

"I like crime novels."

De Gier grinned. "Prefer your own field?"

She shrugged. "But they are nonsense, too. Good versus bad. Good always wins. It doesn't. You know that."

He shrugged, too. "We can try."

She knelt next to him and pushed his shoulder. "Don't tell me you believe in silly morals. Why did you push Karim off that roof? You defined him as bad? What had he done to you?"

De Gier kept grinning. "He wouldn't let Omar have dinner in peace. I'm a cop, I protect the good manners of my city."

"You're hopeless," she said. "Maybe I should take you for what you are. I've slept with idiots before—maybe there are all kinds."

"I bet there are," de Gier told her. "Allow me to help you into your coat."

She smiled at him from the door. "Goodbye."

"Bye now," de Gier said. "Say hello to Martin."

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Transgressors of various degrees of appeal and criminality have attracted the interests of fiction writers over the decades. Some—like Spider Scott (by Kenneth Royce), Alan Grofield and Parker (Richard Stark), Earl Drake (Dan J. Marlowe), John Mannering (John Creasey), Simon Templar (Leslie Charteris), Fu Manchu (Sax Rohmer), Arsene Lupin (Maurice Leblanc—managed to survive the earnest attentions of the Law for quite a long time, accumulating adventures enough to fill lengthy series of books. But none of these miscreants is more beguiling to me than Dan Mallett, whose sixth tale is at hand.

This is *Fly in the Cobweb* (Harper & Row, $14.95) by Frank Parrish. These novels are very different from those the author produces as "Ivor Drummond" or that result when he sits down at the typewriter under his own name, Roger Longrigg. The Mallett stories are rural affairs, filled with the conversations of birds, the activities of nocturnal creatures. One of the latter is, of course, Mallett, who thieves from those on the English countryside who can stand the loss to support himself and accumulate money for the hip operation his aged mother needs. The new owner of Medwell Court, one Harold Dartie, can surely afford to contribute his silver to Dan's medical fund. But someone else has similar notions, murder takes place, and Dan finds himself in stunned face-to-face communion with a merciless killer. This leads to peril from which Dan can see no escape; wondrous indeed are those who offer help. Read this one—then go on to the other five.

Stories of psychic detection have also been around in crime fiction for many years. The latest in this vein is *Shattered Moon* by Kate Green (Dell, $3.95). Here Theresa Fortunato, a young L.A. divorcee, makes a living reading the signs for clients who seek her services. She avoids police matters, but when the Humphreys ask for help in finding their missing daughter, she agrees. As feared, the daughter is dead—murdered. Theresa finds the body and finds herself tormented with flashes of the serial killer, who continues his grisly activities around her—closer and closer around her. The police are skeptical of her powers, suspicious of the accuracy and bounty of her information, and seem unable to preserve her safety when the killer homes in. You'll find this a bit overlong, but certainly an absorbing tale.

A small quiz. Who wrote the stories on which the films *Rear Window, Fear in the Night,* and *The Leopard Lady,* among many others, were based? Whose writings in our field most closely typify what in movies is called film noir? The

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answer is Cornell Woolrich, whose first short crime fiction appeared in the pulp magazines of the middle 1930s. Thirteen of these tales from 1934 and 1935, eight of them in first book appearances, are collected in *Darkness at Dawn,* edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and Martin H. Greenberg (Southern Illinois University Press, $18.95). This is a nicely diverse collection, set on both coasts, a mix of action, suspense, detection, and the macabre, mostly told in first person. This volume, with its good introduction and checklist by Nevins, is a welcome addition to the Woolrich shelf.

Robert Barnard is at his most delectable in *Fete Fatale* (Scribners, $13.95), a witty and precise demolition of the alleged Christians of the Anglican parish of Hexton-on-Weir. The old vicar having died, leaving a desiccated wife of no loving inclination (but with various sympathizers), Father Battersby is appointed to fill the post. The Father has, alas, certain unforgivable notions (he's celibate by conviction, for example), so the unloving ranks close against him. Murder—most unwelcome and unexpected—intrudes, with one of the strangest motives in unrecorded history.

Julian Symons doesn't repeat himself, and *A Criminal Comedy* (Viking, $14.95) is another of his freshly conceived and carefully executed tales of murder. Derek Crowley and Charles Porson are partners in a travel agency in the English town of Headfield. Anonymous letters insist that Derek is bedding Porson's young wife Gerda. There seems to be no truth to the letters, but they do nothing for partnership relations, already strained by Derek's aggressive business ideas. Passions swirl about these couples and their friends, and events progress to death in Venice. I lay long odds you won't identify the guilty before the end.

Nat Hentoff's *The Man from Internal Affairs* (Mysterious Press, $15.95) brings back Noah Green, homicide cop on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Someone is depositing the top half of corpses in neighborhood garbage cans. This is disconcerting to folks who open the cans; also to Noah, whose case it is. Especially since Green is the object of fervent attention by the dreaded Internal Affairs, who root out evil among policemen. This is a stylish, ironic, and perceptive narrative.

June Thomson's eleventh about Inspector Jack Rudd (Inspector Finch in England) is *A Dying Fall* (Doubleday, $12.95). Rudd is a bachelor of middle years, in Thomson's hands a man of feeling and depth and not of cardboard. Here a wealthy man dies, suspiciously, and Rudd asks the natural question: who benefits? The answers are complex, but surely include the son of the deceased, with whom there had been bad feelings, and perhaps the father's long-term mistress. But Rudd is uncomfortable with these answers, with evidences and solutions too readily come into his hands. And he is struggling with an unfamiliar emotion, one strengthened by this case and likely to produce in him

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an unaccustomed rashness. A goodly piece of storytelling, whetting the appetite for more of Rudd.

Anne Perry, in her series about Inspector Pitt and his wife Charlotte, splendidly evokes Victorian London, its grime, its desperate poverty and crime, its glories. The seventh novel is *Death in Devil's Acre* (St. Martin's $14.95), set in 1887. This is somewhat along Jack the Ripper lines. Devil's Acre is where debauchery is at home, where every sexual taste can find satiation, where lots of money is made and the wealthy of both genders go stealthily for entertainment. And where corpse after corpse is found—all male, all members of polite society, all eviscerated. Very messy and dangerous for Pitt; very enjoyable novel for the reader.

Al Nudger fits the private eye convention well: male, unmarried, sleeping around, chronically broke. And he's a practicing coward. *The Right To Sing the Blues* by John Lutz (St. Martin's, $14.95) brings him back for a third case. Fat Jack McGee, a famous jazz clarinetist who now runs a nightclub in New Orleans, calls for help. He's concerned about the relationship between his lead piano player and a not-so-talented young singer who just happens to be the daughter of a gangster who owns a piece of the club. Anything bad happens to the girl and McGee will be fed to the alligators by the gangster's very nasty minions. This is no place for a coward, but there's Nudger right in the deadly middle of it. *Blues* hangs together well; you'll like it.

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"Q"

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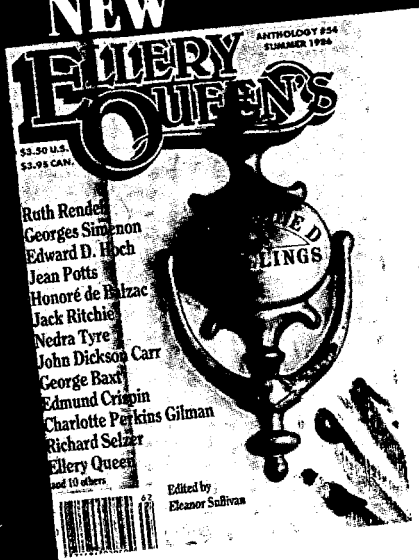

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a *NEW* Griswold story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

"A difference in language can alter a concept," Griswold of the Union Club tells us in one of his sharpest and most poignant puzzles yet—his 47th! . . .

TEN

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The subdued quiet of the Union Club didn't seem to have soothed Baranov. He said sulkily, "My youngest niece came for a visit last week. She's taking German at her college and she's decided to speak only German in order to get lots of practice."

"Very laudable," said Jennings. "Why do you act so annoyed?"

"Because I have to speak German to her, and my German is rusty and she criticizes it—in German. Nasty little snob! Frankly, I think the whole trouble with the world is the different languages people use. We all have the same set of concepts. Why use hundreds of differently coded sounds to represent them?"

I said, indignantly, "What do you want to do? Flatten out the fascinating variations of human culture?"

Baranov said, "What's so fascinating about variations that create suspicions and hatreds and are likely to destroy the world? If we all spoke the same language, that could lead to mutual understanding and fellowship that would foster world unity."

"As it does," I said, dripping sarcasm, "between the English-speaking factions in northern Ireland."

Baranov scowled, but before he could make whatever retort he had in mind Griswold stirred in his apparent sleep and interrupted. His ice-blue eyes blazed as he said, "Concepts are not, in any case, universal. A difference in language can alter a concept."

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"Nonsense—" I began.

Since you seem impressed [interrupted Griswold] with what I have just said, let me explain by citing an instance that applies. It took place in France during the summer of nineteen forty-two. It was preliminary to the Allied commando raid on Dieppe on August nineteenth of that year, which as you may perhaps remember was a tragic fiasco. The German defenders of that coastal city on the Atlantic shore of France were totally prepared. The raiders did *not* achieve the kind of surprise that was essential to success, and by the end of the day half the force, almost all of whom were Canadians, were either killed or captured.

It couldn't have come at a worse time. The Axis forces were at the very peak of their success. Hitler's armies were conducting a second summer campaign in the Soviet Union, driving to the Volga River, while another German army under Rommel had forced its way deep into Egypt. The United States was still staggered by the virtual destruction of their fleet at Pearl Harbor and by the rapid loss to Japan of all the western Pacific from Wake to Burma and from the Philippines to Java. To be sure, we had just won the Battle of Midway, but the results of that were not yet clear. We certainly didn't need anything like the Dieppe catastrophe to feed our suspicions that the Germans and Japanese were invincible.

The trouble was that our information network was still rather unsophisticated at that time.

We did have one French agent who was very effective, however, perhaps because she was a beautiful woman who could befuddle the German officers. How she came to be caught, or betrayed, we never knew, but mortality was high among agents in those days. We could only hope she managed to kill herself, but self-inflicted death was not easy at the hands of the Gestapo.

As it happened, the capture was witnessed, so that that espionage apparatus in France, such as it was, was hastily dismantled in consequence, for the capture of one agent would almost surely lead to the capture of others. Heroism was all but impossible under Gestapo treatment. Later, the network was reinstated with new personnel, and in more sophisticated detail. It wasn't the only such replacement in France during the course of the war. How it was possible to find volunteers for such work is hard to imagine, but those were desperate days.

The witness to the capture was a young Englishman who was

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coming to make contact with her—had he arrived a few minutes earlier he would have been taken with her. He did what he had to do—played the casual passer-by and walked off in another direction. Effective interference was impossible and anything but a callous retreat would have been fatal.

The captured agent saw the young Englishman, however, and having dealt with him before and knowing he was coming, she must have recognized him. She managed to hold up both hands, fingers outstretched. He saw that clearly in the light of the nearly full moon. The Gestapo liked to do its work in the dark of blacked-out streets by the light of dimmed flashlights, but the full moon was one thing they could not black out.

The agent's last gesture might have been a plea for help, a supplication, but the contact didn't think so. She must have known there was no help possible. She might instead have been trying, with true professionalism, to convey one last message.

Both hands, fingers spread, had to represent the number ten. Try the gesture yourself and see if that isn't the way you would silently signal that number.

Ten had significance in their business, and the contact, although he made immediate use of the escape route that led out of France, delayed long enough to make sure that "ten" was radioed to London. He did so at considerable risk to himself, so you must understand that he was by no means a coward—though he was haunted for the rest of his life by the memory of his abandonment of a colleague. Unfortunately, the message contained in the number ten meant nothing. The next week, the commandos were off on their fatal mission to Dieppe.

The conclusion in London was that the French agent had only been raising her hands in supplication after all, as anyone might in the extremity of terror, but the young Englishman never accepted that. To him, it was a signal—and one that he had misinterpreted. It added to his burden of guilt, which was somehow made all the worse by the fact that he didn't see how he could possibly have misinterpreted the message. It was her job to transmit a number and ten was the number. She had a full complement of fingers and all were displayed. What else could that mean but the number ten?

Over and over, he replayed the scene in his mind—and the mystery, and his misery, remained.

I was too young to have participated directly in that event in

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France, or in its consequences. I was, at the time, working in Washington and had already made myself sufficiently useful to the Department to have them keep me out of the draft, but I hadn't yet gained the kind of reputation that would have caused anyone to place a real problem before me.

So it wasn't until twenty years or so after the events in question that I heard the details. I heard them from the Englishman I have been referring to as the contact. His name was Charney. He is dead now so I have no compunction about using his real name.

At the time he told me the tale, he had retired from the service. As for me, I had already been more or less cast into the outer darkness by the Department for the crime of being too often right. We were just two outsiders reminiscing, and he found a certain relief in talking about the matter that had been hounding him for so long.

He explained the method of reporting. One way or another, a simple number was passed from agent to agent, and eventually, after anything from one step to a dozen, it reached London. A number could be passed more innocently and quickly than could words or sentences.

Each number had significance. Key agents had a small book containing numbers in order, and to each number was appended a short phrase or sentence in French—or English, or whatever language might be useful to the agent in question. One would search for a phrase that would represent the uncovered information as closely as possible and transmit that number when more direct ways of transmission were too risky. It was a primitive device in an already-existent era of coding-machines, but a small booklet is more easily hidden and more easily destroyed than almost anything else, and it worked. Naturally, such books had to be replaced from time to time, and that wasn't easy. Other methods had to be used between books.

"I kept mine," Charney told me. "It went out of date as soon as Denise was taken and I should have torn it up or burned it and flushed the remains down a toilet, but I wanted it as a memento so that I wouldn't forget that horrible moment—though, as it turns out, there has never been any danger of forgetting."

"What did 'ten' stand for in the code book?" I asked him.

He said, "I don't have to look it up. I'm not likely ever to forget it. It stood for 'Grandfather has fixed the roof.' "

"What did it mean?"

Charney said gloomily, "The phrases and sentences in the books

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often tended to be Aesopic, and to have indirect meanings, to make it more difficult for the Germans, if they obtained a copy of a current book, to send misleading messages. A particular phrase would, of course, mean different things, according to the texture and the tenor of the times. If we were worried about information leakages, the phrase might mean that a double-agent had been uncovered and dealt with. At another time, it might have something to do with air cover."

"But it served no purpose at the time of Dieppe?"

"None. It had no significance with respect to Dieppe, and that was all that concerned London at the time."

I said, "Are you sure she had all her fingers showing?"

"Positive."

"You were caught by surprise. The vision of her struggling with her Nazi captors, your sudden realization that if you attracted attention it would mean an unpleasant end for you, too, was scarcely conducive to cool and accurate observation. And moonlight can be deceptive, too."

"I am positive she was signaling ten," said Charney.

I said, "There exist larger numbers in the book, don't there? You don't just have the numbers one through ten listed, I suppose?"

"There are nearly a thousand numbers, each with its phrase. Every time a new book was issued, all the phrases were assigned new numbers."

I shook my head. It seemed a typical top-brass procedure —complicated, vulnerable, ambiguous. I have always fought to let a skilled agent in the field work out his own system for transmitting information. Unfortunately, the top-brass in any organization seem congenitally reluctant to allow a free hand for their underlings. It seems to remove the pleasure they feel in despotism.

I said nothing of that. Instead I said, "Suppose she wanted to name a larger number. She couldn't possibly open and close her hands dozens of times to signal the number—not while she was being hustled away by the Gestapo. I doubt that she could have even had the opportunity to signal two or three times, once for each digit of the larger number. It would, for one thing, have drawn fatal attention to you. To signal ten, to throw up her hands with fingers outspread, was a natural gesture that would give rise to no suspicion of hidden meaning. That was so clever of the poor woman. What a sad loss her capture was."

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Charney stared at me in annoyance. "What are you talking about?"

"About a larger number which I want you to look up in your book." I gave him the number.

He continued to stare at me for a moment, then he turned to the book, riffled the pages, and found the number. He read, in a horrified manner, "The reapers are ready, the scythes are sharp, the wheat will be mown."

I said, "How would that have been interpreted at the time?"

He said in a hollow voice, "The Germans were prepared and were waiting for us at Dieppe."

"If that number had been sent, then, would the operation have been aborted?"

"I'm sure it would have been. There were important people who were against the operation as it was. —But she never signaled that number. It was *ten*, I tell you."

"It wasn't ten," I said. "It couldn't have been ten."

"All ten fingers were up!"

"Even so, the number signaled couldn't possibly have been ten."

"What on earth could it be, if not ten?"

So I told him, and after I explained he had to accept it. I don't suppose it made him feel better to know that not only had he been forced to witness the capture of a brave colleague, whom he had had to leave to her fate, but that he had misinterpreted her message and brought about the failure at Dieppe.

Perhaps I should have kept my knowledge to myself. The trouble is, I don't seem to be able to. Certainly I would be far better off today in a material sense if I had managed to keep my knowledge to myself on certain occasions. On the whole, though, I believe the truth must be faced at whatever cost.

Griswold heaved a vinous sigh and turned back to the comfort of the Scotch-and-soda in his hand.

Jennings said indignantly, "Come on, Griswold. You can't get away with that. What number can ten outspread fingers stand for but ten?"

"You don't see it, either?" said Griswold with a sour sneer. "The captured agent was a Frenchwoman, and to her ten fingers stood not for 'ten' but for *'dix.'* "

"That doesn't matter," I said at once. " *'Dix'* is just French for 'ten.' It doesn't matter whether you call it 'ten,' *'dix,' 'Zehn,' 'diez,' 'dieci,'*

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'decem,' 'desyat,' or even *'skbooch.'* All those words stand for the same concept, that of the number of fingers on two hands."

"How prettily you show off your knowledge of language," said Griswold. "The fact is that the universality of concept does not apply here. 'Ten' is a combination of three particular letters and *'dix'* is a combination of three other letters. That makes a difference, and the captured agent, in signaling *'dix,'* meant *'dix'* and not 'ten.' "

"How could you mean one and not the other?" I demanded.

Griswold took another sip of his drink and stroked his moustache. " 'Ten,' " he said, "is only 'ten,' but *'dix'* can be read as a Roman numeral—and as a Roman numeral, DIX stands for five hundred and nine. That was the number she was signaling, and the phrase it stood for would have stopped the Dieppe raid."

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a *NEW* Ganelon II story by

JAMES POWELL

"I guess I'm what the English would call a go-ahead person," said Ernest Caliban, former head of Van Horne Associates, one of Europe's largest advertising concerns. "I like fresh ideas. On my last visit to the home office, I approached Mr. Van Horne himself with a suggestion to update a medium we use a lot, the animated sandwich."

"The animated what, sir?" Marbot had to ask.

"You know, two advertising boards with a man inside," said Caliban . . .

DEATH'S SANDWICH MAN

by JAMES POWELL

In 1902, after a lifetime pursuing San Sebastiano's dream of Levantine empire, retired Lancer Sergeant Gratien Marbot came back home to the Principality. In his boyhood, the streets of the Babylon quarter where he had grown up had been a crush of glossy carriages, ramshackle pushcarts, and spry hansoms out for middle-class hire. Its street cries mixed the polite call of the pate-de-foie seller amid his honking gaggle with the rag-and-bone man's tired sing-song and the voice of the crocodile of blind Swiss yodelers who came each afternoon around three, their leader tapping the way and the measure with his cane. The apartment buildings he remembered might shelter a member of the Academy with an ancient title on the first floor and a poor family of twelve making bees and dragonflies for the millinery trade under the eaves. In those days, a dusty little ship like the one where Marbot's father sat at a ram's-head mull serving customers who expected their snuff ground fresh daily

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might stand alongside a gleaming establishment selling the finest whips and canes.

But Marbot returned to a Babylon quarter of hushed and sedate traffic, fashionable apartments, and shops expensive without exception. A single invention was the cause. The elevator made an apartment under the eaves almost as desirable—and nearly as expensive—as one on the first floor. So the poor and the near poor had moved elsewhere, carting off the brighter part of the quarter in their baggage. Ironically, the job that the returning Marbot found to supplement his sergeant's pension was working half days running an elevator in a Babylon office building with a prosperous weight of brass nameplates at the door.

On a warm, slow August morning in 1908, Marbot sat on a stool outside his elevator. Even when, as at that moment, he was speculating on nothing sadder than his approaching lunch, the old man exhibited a face of striking mournfulness. His white eyebrows and his moustache and the tired corners of his mouth drooped tragically. His eyes were sad brown pools where whole litters of puppies might have been drowned.

Marbot looked up as a frail large-headed young man with a club foot came into the lobby and crossed to the elevator. The new arrival had a marked squint, a hefty nose, and carried a large leather portfolio. He asked to be taken to the seventh-floor offices of the St. Blaise Company, a manufacturer of medicinal cigarettes. During the slow ascent, Marbot was conscious that his passenger was watching him intently out of the corner of his eye. As he left the elevator, the young man looked back over his shoulder in a blatant stare.

Puzzled, Marbot returned to the lobby, where he promptly forgot the whole business until a half hour later when he was summoned back up to the seventh floor. The young man with the portfolio limped into the elevator, his chin a determined jut. "I must have your face, you know," he insisted. "I really must."

Marbot started the elevator on its downward course to cover his confusion. Then the man's portfolio prompted him to say, "Ah, sir, you're an artist. You mean you wish to sketch my face."

"I am an artist of another kind altogether," said the young man. "I am a master of the art of bringing a company's products to the attention of the buying public. I've just now proposed to the St. Blaise people an advertising campaign built around marching cigarettes."

"Marching cirarettes, sir?" scoffed Marbot politely, for he rather

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hoped the young man meant to use his face to promote some healthy aperitif or stout cheese.

"Rank on rank of cigarettes," insisted the young man, "some plain, some cork-tipped, parading through the streets of San Sebastiano behind banners reading, 'St. Blaise Cigarettes, Valiant Soldiers in the War Against Afflictions of the Throat.' " He shrugged and looked away. "Unfortunately, the idea had too much zip for Messieurs St. Blaise." After a moment he added, "Still, I must have your face."

"You have other clients then, sir?" asked Marbot hopefully as they reached the lobby.

The young man seemed in no hurry to answer the question or to leave the elevator. He extended his hand to be shaken.

"Ernest Caliban," he said. "Until three months ago I headed up the San Sebastiano office of Van Horne Associates, one of Europe's largest advertising concerns, with headquarters in Amsterdam. My future was bright there. I had reason to believe I had even found personal favor in the eyes of the eldest Miss Van Horne. My one complaint was the conservative approach we were expected to bring to our work. Everything had to be unobtrusive, polite, and blastedly long-winded. Well, I guess I'm what the English would call a go-ahead person. I like fresh ideas. On my last visit to the home office, I approached Mr. Van Horne himself with a suggestion to update a medium we use a lot, the animated sandwich."

"The animated what, sir?" Marbot had to ask.

"You know, two advertising boards with a man inside," said Caliban. "Some Englishman earned an earldom two hundred years ago by hitting on the idea of sending nondescripts into the streets carrying promotional messages back and front. My idea was to choose the sandwich man to suit the product—like a jolly fat man, say, in a chef's hat and carrying a tasting spoon to advertise a restaurant.

"But Van Horne said it lacked dignity. When I pressed my case, our discussion grew heated. Throwing my resignation in his face, I stormed out. I came back and opened my own office here. I would become an advertising tycoon overnight and return in triumph to claim the elder Miss Van Horne's hand." He gave a bitter, self-mocking laugh. "In the last three months, I haven't found one single solitary client. So now I must win my way back into Van Horne's good graces. I believe my mistake was describing my sandwich-man idea when I should have demonstrated it. That's why I've been looking for a face like yours these past few days. Van Horne arrives in San Sebastiano tomorrow to meet with clients."

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Marbot could not refuse the sum Caliban offered for a morning's work—all the more so because he knew switching shifts would be no problem. He had obliged the afternoon man many times in the past and at much shorter notice.

The next morning at the hour appointed, Marbot arrived across the street from the railway station. A closed carriage stood at the curb with the driver in the box and Caliban waiting in the padded and buttoned interior. He pulled the old man down beside him. On the opposite seat was a pile of clothing and a stack of advertising boards.

"Now here's the ticket," said Caliban earnestly. "You are going to confront Van Horne on the street several times this morning, each time wearing a different costume and message. You will say 'Good day, Mr. Van Horne,' give him a wink, and walk on by without another word. By morning's end, I think he'll see that that fellow Caliban's idea is a winner." The young man took a paper from his pocket and consulted it. "The elder Miss Van Horne has been kind enough to provide me with her father's itinerary," he explained. "We don't have much time. His train arrives at nine-forty."

Marbot's first costume consisted of a grey ankle-length smock, a rope belt, and a long-handled scythe. He was Father Time and he carried this message courtesy of the Monumental Clock Company: "Each Hour Wounds. The Last One Kills." Marbot cleared his throat. "A bit—lugubrious, don't you think?"

"But that's the whole point, old fellow," laughed Caliban. "It's just the message for that face of yours."

Marbot sighed. It made him unhappy to think he looked so sad. Nevertheless, a few minutes later, scythe and all, he had taken up his position across the street behind one of the colossal Egyptian columns of the railway-station facade. The work of the Principality's renowned architect, Paul-David Steiner, the station was based on an entry of his which had failed to win the 1870 competition to find set designs for Verdi's *Aida*.

Marbot recognized Van Horne from Caliban's description as soon as the big man strode out of the station. Broad-shouldered and lantern-jawed, he wore a grey suit and a panama hat and carried a small metal case by a handle in one large hand. A yellow rosebud decorated his lapel. ("His lucky flower, he calls it," Caliban had said.) The rosebud had a way of contributing to the man's air of great physical strength.

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Van Horne crossed to the curb, where a pink-and-blue-striped pole indicated a horse-tram stop. Standing there, he saw Marbot approach with fearless blue eyes. He only raised an eyebrow when he read the message the old man carried. But his massive jaw fell in surprise when he heard himself greeted by name and saw the wink. Marbot passed by quickly, feeling the puzzled eyes boring into his back. He walked the length of the railway station and then turned into a side street where the carriage was waiting for him.

Expressing himself pleased with the old man's performance, Caliban showed him his next outfit, a devil costume cut from plaid material, complete with horns and a barbed tail. The message read: "Scotch Devil Bug Killer Says, 'Death To All Insects!' " The young man consulted the itinerary again. Rapping on the little door in the roof, he gave the driver fresh instructions that sent the carriage clattering off.

When they reached their new destination, Caliban pushed the leather window curtain open a crack and said, "See that office building? Stand over there in the doorway with your back to the street. When Van Horne arrives, you'll see his reflection in the shop window. Give him time to read the message. Then turn." He checked his watch and itinerary again. "He'll be here in four minutes. Punctuality's another of his superstitions."

Punctual Van Horne almost jumped out of his skin when he saw the Scotch devil's face. And when the sandwich man spoke his name and winked, the big man plunged a hand inside his coat—but he stopped himself and fled past into the office building. Marbot did not later mention he thought he glimpsed a pistol butt when Van Horne reached inside his coat. He might have been mistaken.

For his next appearance, Marbot wore a black-silk body suit painted with the white bones of a skeleton. A skull mask covered his face. In one clutch of finger bones, he carried a circus clown's umbrella from whose upraised ferrule spouted a modest shower of water when he worked the squeeze ball hidden in the handle. "The Seamless Coffin Company Wonders, Are Your Loved Ones Suffering from Seepage?" asked his sandwich boards. Caliban had stationed him on a street corner where in a few minutes a tram passed with a pale and harried Van Horne sitting in a window seat. Catching the man's attention, Marbot quickly stripped off the mask and mouthed his greeting. Van Horne threw up his hands as though the words and the wink were blows to be warded off. Then the tram rolled away.

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Back in the carriage, Marbot described Van Horne's terrified reaction and protested that things weren't going as they'd expected.

Caliban heard him out and nodded gravely. "It sure sounds like he's taking things the wrong way," he conceded. The young man rubbed his jaw thoughtfully for a moment. Then he said, "Look, I'd only planned one more meeting for you. It just might make my point with Van Horne. I mean, one more meeting can't do that much harm." When Marbot hesitated, Caliban pulled out the paper again and tapped the last item. "His train leaves at three forty-five. I intend to be there at the station. I'll straighten the whole thing out with him then. One and done, right?"

The next thing Marbot knew, he was on the crowded Boulevard Trancredi made up as an undertaker's mute in black suit and gloves, a high-crowned hat with a black crepe hatband that almost swept the ground, and carrying a suggestion from Napoli the Undertaker that read: "Prepare To Meet Your Doom. See Napoli and Die in Peace." Marbot spotted Van Horne first. The big man's stride was wary. Using the crowd as a shield, Marbot reached him unseen. When the undertaker's mute stepped out to bar his way, Van Horne did not even wait for the greeting. Uttering a short terrible cry, he plunged out into the busy street as though hell's entire kennel was on his heels.

Marbot changed back into his own clothes in the moving carriage, downcast and ashamed of himself. At last Caliban broke the silence.

"Cheer up, old fellow," he said. "I promise I'll set things straight at the station. There'll be more sandwich-man work for you, depend on it." Here the young man counted Marbot's wages into his palm. Then he rapped on the roof, bringing the carriage to a stop. "Please excuse me for not taking you back to your building. I'm a bit pressed for time and I still have these costumes to return."

A moment later, Marbot was standing alone on a curb in a remote section of the city out by the gasworks. He was supposed to take over the elevator at one o'clock and it was now ten of. He started out on foot and walked for fifteen minutes without reaching a tram line. Finally he had to hail a cab fresh from the stable on its way to town to start the day. Marbot arrived at work twenty-five minutes late. "Twenty-six," insisted the other elevator operator.

Marbot took his place on the stool in the lobby and pondered his curious morning. And, yes, there had been something else. As Van

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Horne dodged off through the traffic, Marbot had noticed that the metal case he carried was chained to his wrist.

Suddenly a voice from the past said, "Shall we mount up, Sergeant?" A tall gentleman wearing a suit of impeccable cut stood smiling down on the elevator operator holding a large kid-gloved finger skyward.

"Captain Ganelon, sir!" exclaimed Marbot, jumping to his feet. "What brings you to my end of town, sir?" The two men had both worn the horizon-blue tunics and pink trousers of the Tripoline Lancers back in the days when San Sebastiano had tried to profit from British, French, and Italian rivalries to carve itself a slice of the Middle Eastern pie.

The famous detective, the second to bear the Ambrose Ganelon name, tapped his jaw. "A tooth to be cobbled," he said. "My Doctor Stock vacations at Dinard. His office recommended your Doctor Bouchard." Ganelon's inflection turned the name into a question.

"Ah, sir, he's a General Ravencroft sort, I'm afraid," said Marbot sympathetically. A Confederate veteran of the American Civil War, Ravencroft, their lancer commanding officer, had earned his nickname "Old Hack-and-Slash" from the way he achieved military objectives no matter what the cost.

Ganelon sighed glumly and stepped into the elevator. As the machine plodded upward, Marbot thought to distract him from their destination by relating his adventures that morning as a costumed sandwich man. When they reached the eighth floor, the detective paused to hear the end of the story. Then he squared his shoulders and marched off down the hall.

Marbot was about to return to the lobby when the buzzer summoned him up to the seventh floor. He arrived there, mind filled with lancer days, slid back the elevator door, and found himself standing face to face with Van Horne. They were both struck dumb by surprise. The big Dutchman turned white and his eyes bulged. After a moment, his twitching mouth uttered dry noises.

Marbot recovered first. "Please get in, Mr. Van Horne," he said contritely. "I much regret—"

Marbot's words unbound Van Horne's feet and vocal cords. The man gave an animal cry, and striking at Marbot's reassuring hand with the metal case chained to his wrist he bolted down the hall and disappeared through the door leading to the stairwell.

For his own sake, Marbot knew he must intercept the fleeing man, explain the whole business, and ask pardon for his part in it. He

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dropped the elevator down to the lobby, framing his apology as he went. He arrived there well before the Dutchman could have made it using the stairs.

Marbot waited five minutes. When Van Horne did not appear, he waited five minutes more. Was Van Horne cowering somewhere on the dim stairwell? The old lancer was about to go and search out the big man when a very urgent ringing summoned him upstairs.

Ambrose Ganelon was waiting at the elevator door with a dental napkin soiled with blood under his chin. Further down the hall, the dentist was standing in his doorway armed with some of the weapons of his trade.

"Intriguing, that story of yours, the morbid costumes and messages, the pistol butt and the box chained to the wrist," said the detective. "It quite kept my mind from my little ordeal. And yet the whole business is curiously incomplete. I have to conclude that the sinister invention still has a shoe or two to drop. In other words, I think you will encounter your Van Horne again."

When the old man tried to speak, Ganelon silenced him with a gesture. "This is important, Marbot. Tell him he is in danger. Tell him to get in touch with me."

Marbot broke in to tell of his fresh encounter with Van Horne and the man's subsequent disappearance.

"Damn," said Ganelon, striking himself on the temple with the heel of his palm, "I should have seen where all this was heading." He started toward the stairs. "Come along," he ordered. "At the gallop." As they rushed by the waiting dentist, the detective gave back the napkin and cocked his head apologetically. "A professional matter, my dear Doctor. I promise to return shortly." As the stairwell door closed behind them, he added, "We must not offend those who hold our teeth in their power, eh, Marbot?"

The flight of steps before them was broken halfway down by a landing where a window framed a view of the topmost turrets of the Old Port's Fort St. Odile. They passed the landing and reached the seventh-floor doorway and started down the next flight of steps. Suddenly Ganelon stopped and bent over. Small downy feathers had been stirred up from the steps by their passage.

The detective caught several in the cup of his hand and looked down at them. Then he raised them to his nose. Straightening up and scouring the feathers away with his other hand, he glanced back at the doorway. He started downward again, watchful and taking the steps one at a time.

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In a moment, he knelt to examine an area to which more of the little feathers had adhered. Rising and absently rubbing his fingertips, he continued down to the second landing, whose window looked directly out onto the roof of the office building next door. For a moment he stared down into the gloomy stairwell, whose other landings had small gaslights instead of windows. Suddenly he said, "Do you know an English writer named Samuel Butler, Marbot?

"No? Well, he once described a chicken as an egg's way of making another egg." The detective joined Marbot in a smile. Then he continued, "Yes, it is incongruous that something as perfect as a little egg would have to come up with such a contraption as a chicken—cluck, wattles, comb, and all—to make another perfect little egg." Without another word to the bewildered Marbot, Ganelon threw open the landing window and stuck his head outside. Then he vaulted over the sill and dropped the four feet to the roof, where he stooped over and picked up a battered yellow rosebud from the leads.

"Van Horne's lucky flower," agreed Marbot as the detective helped him out through the window. They crossed the roof together, passing a small hut with a door that led down into the building. The door was bolted from the inside. Beyond the hut and at the far edge of the roof stood a large ruined pigeon cote which had been built to resemble a pagoda.

"Many hereabouts raised pigeons when I was a boy," recalled Marbot. "Some for sport. Some for food."

Ganelon pulled open a door in the rear of the pigeon cote and stuck his head inside while Marbot peered around him. In the narrow aisle once used by the pigeon raiser to tend his birds lay a large corpse in a grey suit, the back of the jacket dark with blood. The metal case attached to the dead wrist was open and empty. A rifled billfold lay nearby. In the aisle beyond the body were scattered a crushed panama, a bloody towel, and a punctured green-satin pillow decorated with a rose entwined with a cabbage and the orange motto, "A Souvenir of San Sebastiano."

"It's Van Horne," acknowledged Marbot, spreading his hands in helpless mystification.

Ganelon allowed the old man a moment before turning him away from the gruesome scene. "Come along, my friend," he urged. "We have a murderer to apprehend."

As they started back across the roof, Ganelon said, "To understand today's events, we must try to see them through Van Horne's eyes.

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In the course of the morning he encounters Gratien Marbot, you of the mournful countenance, in four widely separated locations. Each time you are carrying a different morbid message and dressed appropriately. Van Horne is a superstitious man, one of those who finds hidden meanings in events which you and I would consider insignificant. For such a man these encounters cannot be just macabre coincidence. He must read them as a portent, a warning. But a warning about what?"

Ganelon made a stirrup of his hands to help the old man back up through the window. As Marbot was clambering inside, the detective continued, "Van Horne wouldn't have to stretch too far to conclude that someone was in danger of death and, since you mentioned his name at each encounter, that he was the someone." Ganelon placed both hands on the window ledge and raised himself until he could get his knee over the sill. "Later the same day Van Horne rings for an elevator and, lo and behold, there you are again. Suddenly the warning is clear. The elevator is going to crash. When you urge him to enter, he bolts for the stairs. And that is exactly what the murderer intended him to do. Your Mr. Caliban is waiting on those first few steps up to the eighth floor when Van Horne bursts through the door, thinking he is running for his life instead of to his death. Caliban shoots him from behind, using the pillow to muffle the sound. Then he drags the body down and tumbles it out the window. The absence of any gunpowder smell suggested it was already open for that purpose.

"Next he cleaned up the blood. Then he left by the window, closing it behind him. He dragged the body over to the old pigeon cote where it might have remained undiscovered for years except for your compassion and my fortunate toothache. I rather think Caliban left by the same way he came—the door in the roof which he bolted after him."

"Now I see what you meant back there, sir," said Marbot. "Mr. Caliban certainly did build himself an elaborate chicken indeed, what with me and the costumes and the messages. You'd think it would have been simpler for a cripple to find a less formidable victim."

"But he didn't," said Ganelon. "Let's see if we can't find out why. Where was Van Horne before he rang for the elevator?" Marbot enumerated the occupants of the eighth floor—a secretarial service, an insurance broker, a diamond merchant, and a rare-book dealer.

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"Diamonds and Dutchmen go together," said the detective. "We'll start there."

The diamond merchant recognized Ganelon at once from the many dandified caricatures of him in the pages of *Le Roi Rigolo*, the Principality's comic weekly. Van Horne, he informed the detective, was a diamond courier who made monthly trips from Amsterdam to Naples by way of Paris and Milan. "You can set your watch by his coming through that door," he added. "I once suggested his regular habits might make things easy for a robber. Van Horne only laughed. He said he trusted his revolver and his practice of keeping to crowded streets, the daylight hours, and public transportation."

The diamond merchant winked. "Between you and me, I think he itches for someone to take him on." The diamond merchant thought of something and began searching through the crowded cubbyholes in his desk. "A year ago, at high noon, outside the Bourse in Marseilles three Corsican brothers named Carlotti tried to force Van Horne into a carriage. He shot one in the shoulder, almost broke another's jaw, and sat on all three until the police arrived."

He gave up on the cubbyholes and started rummaging through drawers. "A fearless man, all right. But here's something funny. Today he seemed jumpy and preoccupied. When I asked why, he muttered something about Death dogging his footsteps. Ah, here we are." The diamond merchant pulled out a photograph clipped from a French rotogravure. "He brought me this after the Marseilles business. He isn't above a bit of a brag." The photograph showed three toughs waiting in the dock to be sentenced. Their squints and substantial noses were not unfamiliar to Marbot.

When the diamond merchant saw Ganelon and the old man exchange grim glances, he became concerned for Van Horne's safety. Explaining what had happened, Ganelon asked to use the telephone. As he waited for the operator he told Marbot, "We thought this particular contraption too complicated because we didn't understand all its functions. It was more than robbery and murder. The killer was avenging himself on Van Horne who had sent his brothers to prison." Ganelon spoke into the telephone and asked to be connected with the Prefecture. Then he continued.

"And I have no doubt he was also avenging himself against his brothers. I imagine they held him in contempt because he was a cripple. He could not tear from life what he wanted but had to coax it to him with words. So he would succeed alone where they had

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failed together. He would rob and kill Van Horne. And he would escape scot-free. Perhaps we can provide a capture to fit the crime at the railway station."

When Ganelon hung up the telephone, Marbot said, "But what if he takes a boat or rents a carriage, sir? Or just decides to hide out here."

"But Caliban—or Carlotti, as we now know him—had a train-departure time on his itinerary," said Ganelon. "Why? Not for Van Horne, who in Carlotti's plan of things would be long dead by then. No, Carlotti intends to take the same train that Van Horne would have taken. Why? Because when Van Horne failed to show up at his Milan stop, the police would be called in. Finding his baggage at the Milan station, the police would assume that whatever happened to him happened to him there."

Carlotti reached the railway station five minutes before the departure of the Milan Express. He redeemed Van Horne's suitcase with the ticket he had taken from the dead man's billfold. He gave the bag to a porter and limped behind him down the Grand Concourse which led to the gates to the trains. The Grand Concourse was lined with colossal statues in the Egyptian style of the rulers of the Principality, from Guido Tancredi who held sway as Sixto the First to the more recent Prince Adalbert the Good. Just before Carlotti reached the gate to the Milan train, a white-uniformed policeman stepped out from behind the mighty slippers of Princess Glorianna, who had driven the Tangerine pirates from the Mediterranean. He smiled as though he knew Carlotti and started a finger to the visor of his kepi.

His mind reeling, Carlotti swung around and limped back the way he had come. The policeman did not follow him. Had Carlotti met the man out of uniform in a cafe, perhaps, during the weeks in the Principality working out the details of Van Horne's death? Perhaps that was it. But there was no need to take any chances. There were other trains, or other ways to get out of San Sebastiano when it came to that.

But as he approached the main entrance, another policeman emerged from the left-hand concourse where the ticket windows were and took a casual position in front of the doors. He saluted Carlotti and opened his mouth as if to speak. Quickly the young Corsican turned into the other concourse where the baggage and

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customs areas were. He had planned things well and knew there was an exit onto a side street there.

The door in question was down a short flight of steps. When Carlotti was twenty feet away, a smiling policeman strolled up the steps. Carlotti did not even wait for him to raise a finger to his kepi. He swung around and started to limp back the way he had come. But another smiling policeman had stepped up behind him. Now there was noplace to go but through a narrow door with a small pane of wired glass in it. Carlotti did not hesitate. He opened the door and stepped inside.

He found himself in an elevator. "Good afternoon, Mr. Carlotti," said the policeman at the control. "Going down, are we?" With a smile and a wink, he dropped the machine down to the basement where, among other things, was the small holding cell used by customs officers for suspected smugglers.

DETECTIVERSE

A CLOSE SHAVE

by BOB PERKINS

Hippety hop to the barber shop—
It's located down by the harbor.
It's cheaper there, but be aware:
Sweeney Todd's the barber.

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Granny was turning out the quilts one after the other and getting dear prices for them. Folks, of course, being naturally curious, wondered what she was doing with the money and stories began to circulate about her hiding it somewhere around her cabin . . .

GRANNY'S HOARD

by CLAYTON and PATRICIA MATTHEWS

Granny Hicks had lived all of her eighty-five years on the mountain. When she married Jeb Hicks back in '21, she just moved down the mountain a mite from her folks' place to the pinewood cabin Jeb had built for her. They were married fifty years, and when Jeb died Granny lived on alone in the cabin. She and Jeb were never blessed with any young'uns.

I said Granny was eighty-five, but none of us down at Heifer's Crossing actually knew how old Granny really was. I don't think even Granny knew. But eighty-five, that has a nice sound to it, and it wasn't far off the mark, give or take a year or two.

Folks tried to talk Granny out of staying in the old cabin. Lord knows anything could happen to her, old as she was and all alone like that, but she wouldn't budge.

It wasn't that she wasn't spry enough, and she certainly didn't want for anything. She kept busy with her garden and her quilting. Granny's quilts were known far and wide—some folks called her the Grandma Moses of quilting.

She started making quilts for sale after Jeb's death. There wasn't a great deal of demand at first. Of course, all the folks in Heifer's Crossing bought at least one of her quilts, out of good neighborliness and a desire to give Granny a helping hand. She would never accept charity, and this was a way to get around that.

But then a lady antique buyer stopped in the general store one day and saw one of Granny's quilts hanging on the wall, a For Sale sign on it. A whole twenty dollars. This lady from the city bought it, and first thing you know other buyers came looking for a Granny Hicks quilt.

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Soon Granny couldn't keep up with the demand, and the price kept going up and up. That didn't faze the buyers. One buyer told me confidentially that his customers would pay almost any price for a quilt with the name Miranda Hicks sewn down in the right hand corner.

The up in the price was mostly my doing. I'm Alvin Bridges. I own the general store in Heifer's Crossing and I'm also the constable in these parts. Being constable don't take up much of my time, and don't pay very much, either.

Since Granny didn't have any means of transportation, I used to drive up the mountain once a week, pick her up, and bring her down to my store so she could buy her week's supplies. About once a month she would take the bus into the city. I offered to drive her in, but she wouldn't have it. "You do enough for me, Alvin. Besides, I like to browse in all them fancy stores. I never buy anything, just like to look. You'd be bored spitless tagging along with me."

When the quilts began to go like hot cakes, I urged Granny to up the price.

"Oh, I don't know, Alvin. It somehow don't seem right to me to put such a high-falutin' price-tag on them old quilts."

"Miranda, city folks don't really appreciate something unless they have to pay dear for it. That's the first law of merchandising."

She laughed that rich, almost coquettish laugh of hers and put a thin, blue-veined hand on my arm. "I swan, Alvin, you are a caution! Now what would an old lady like me know about merchandising?"

"We're never too old to learn, Miranda—none of us is."

She gave me a sly look. " 'Course the fact that you get a commission on ever sale wouldn't have anything to do with your telling me to raise the price, would it?"

"I try not to pass up many chances to make an extra dollar."

"Well, I'll leave it in your hands, Alvin. But the thing is, what am I going to do with all that money?"

I guess that's what started the rumors—Granny's hoard. You see, this was all of fifteen years ago, and Granny was still turning out the quilts one after the other, and I was getting upwards to five hundred dollars apiece for them. The thing was, Granny spent maybe twenty dollars a week in my store and that was about it.

Folks, of course, being naturally curious, wondered what she was doing with the rest of the money and stories began to circulate about her hiding it somewhere around her cabin. I did what I could to discourage that kind of talk, but a rumor like that is hard to stop.

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It's like a snowball rolling downhill—the farther it goes, the bigger it gets.

I didn't dare ask Granny what she was doing with the extra money and she never volunteered any information. She could be close-mouthed when she wanted to.

And then Jake came back home. Jake was from Jeb's side of the family, a grandnephew or some such. Jake had been a no-good from the word scratch, always into some scrape or another, and he'd left our part of the country at sixteen, ten years or so back, and we hadn't heard a word of him since. In fact, he'd left with me right on his tail. He'd knifed another boy in a fight. The other boy wasn't seriously hurt, but I'd gotten a warrant against Jake for assault with a deadly weapon. He had skedaddled before I could round him up.

By the time he came back, the statute of limitations had long since run out, so I had no cause to arrest him. What I didn't know, until it was all over, was that he'd escaped a week before from the pen in a neighboring state.

The first I knew of Jake's reappearance was when I went up to fetch Granny down to my store for her weekly shopping. It was full summer and I was a mite surprised to find the cabin door closed. Her hearing was still keen, and she almost always heard my old car laboring up the grade and was waiting in the doorway for me.

I was a bit concerned as I walked across the warped boards of the cabin porch. At her age she could have passed away in her sleep. I rapped hard on the door, calling out, "Miranda?"

I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard footsteps inside. Then I began to worry again. The footsteps weren't hers.

The door opened just enough for me to see a ferret face and plastered-down hair the color of mud. Recognition was like a jolt to the ribs. "Jake!"

"Hidy, constable." He grinned unpleasantly, showing sharp, yellowed teeth. "It's been a while. Surprised to see me, I'll bet."

"You might say that. What brought you back to these parts?"

"Why shouldn't I come back? It's my home place, ain't it?" Jake said with a sneer. "And Granny, she's the only kin I got left. I been longing to see her again. So when I had a chance to come back, I took it."

"Is she all right?" I asked sharply.

" 'Course she's all right, why shouldn't she be?"

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"I'd like to see for myself. I've driven up to take her down the mountain for groceries."

"No need for that. I'll see to her needs." He closed the door a fraction. "She's laying down right now. I got in late last night and we sat up talking. She's plumb tuckered out."

I hesitated, torn by doubt. I hated to drive off without seeing her. On the other hand, if I just barged in she might not take too kindly to that.

"Well, I guess I'll be going then," I said lamely. "Tell her I was by, will you? And that I'll drop by on Friday for that new quilt she promised."

"Why, sure, constable," Jake said with a nasty smirk. "I'll be sure and tell her that."

The rest I pieced together after it was all over, but I think I got it all pretty straight.

Jake Hicks closed the door and barred it. He leaned against it for a bit, a self-satisfied grin on his face. He'd fooled that constable, like he'd fooled other lawmen. Except for the one time—and that wasn't his fault, a buddy had blown the whistle on him.

He looked over at the rocking chair where Granny Hicks was tied and gagged with adhesive tape across her mouth. Jake had jammed a block of wood under the rocker slats so the chair wouldn't move.

He scowled over at her. She was proving to be much more stubborn than he had expected a frail, eighty-five-year-old woman to be.

He started toward her, drywashing his hands. "Well, old woman, we're going to get back to it. You're going to tell me where you've hidden your hoard." Seizing a corner of the tape, he brutally ripped it away. Granny flinched and cried out.

"Hurts, does it?" he said. "Well, you're going to hurt more'n that if you don't do as I say."

Granny worked her dry lips, finally managing to croak, "Some water—could I have some water?"

He started toward the kitchen lean-to, then halted in his tracks, staring at her. "No water, old woman. No water *or* food until you tell me where it is."

Granny shook her head from side to side. "There ain't no hoard, Jake. Folks just made all that up."

"Made it up, did they? We'll see about that. Wait until you get hungry and thirsty enough, then you'll be happy to cough it up."

He began to prowl restlessly around the small cabin. He had al-

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ready gone through coffee cans, flour bins, and everything else he could think of. He had even torn apart the featherbed mattress. All he had found was about twenty dollars in her purse. He just knew she must have several thousand dollars hidden around. She must have buried it somewhere. And if she didn't tell him where, she was going to live to regret it. Or not live. He stopped in thought. Of course he couldn't leave her alive—she'd tell that constable on him.

But first she was going to tell him where she'd hidden the money. How long could an old woman like her go without food or water? Surely not more than a few days.

As he stomped back into the front room, Granny said, "Jake, can you untie me and let me set over there at my quilting frame? I promised to have that quilt finished by Friday. You heard Alvin—he'll be picking it up to put on sale down to his store."

Jake skidded to a stop. Friday! That was only three days away. If it wasn't finished by then and that constable came nosing around again, he'd demand to see the old lady.

Granny said, "You don't have to worry. I can hardly run fast enough to get away."

Maybe working on the quilt would tire her out faster. Jake made up his mind. "All right. But I'm going to hobble your legs and I'm still tying you to the rocker at night."

He untied her. In a grumbling voice he said, "If'n you'd tell me what I want to know, I'd just go away and leave you alone with your blamed quilt."

"I can't tell you what I don't know, Jake. There ain't any money here."

When she was on her feet, he shoved her roughly over to the straight chair before her quilting frame. Then he hobbled her legs so she couldn't bolt if he took his eyes off her.

As she began working, he moved around behind the chair and stared at the quilt with only mild curiosity. The quilt was formed from many squares, a square with a picture alternating with a square of plain fabric. The picture squares all seemed the same to him—a cabin with an open door and a tiny woman in a rocking chair on the front porch.

Jake lost interest and moved away. For the life of him, he couldn't see why anybody would pay good money for something like that. But some fools would pay through the nose for anything that had become a fad. Up to five hundred a pop for Granny's quilts, and she had been making them for years now! Well, that money would fi-

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nance a trip to the West Coast, where he could get away from all the heat he was under after breaking out of the pen.

Now all he had to do was find the money.

As Granny quilted, Jake squatted before the fireplace, studying the rough stones laid down for the hearth. He'd heard that people sometimes hid their valuables under such stones. He tried in vain to find a loose one. Finally, he went into the kitchen lean-to for a butcher knife. After chipping out the mortar and prying up a few of the stones, he gave up in disgust.

In frustration he began ripping up the warped floorboards with a clawhammer.

"You're going to all that work for naught, Jake," Granny said calmly, scarcely looking up from what she was doing.

"You shut up, old woman!" he snarled, whirling on her. "You tell me where your hoard is and I won't have to tear up your place."

"Ain't no hoard, Jake, I tole you."

"And I know you're lying. When you get hungry and thirsty enough, you'll tell me!"

By dark, the cabin was a shambles and still Jake had found nothing. After lighting a coal oil lamp, he rousted Granny away from the quilting frame and tied her to the rocker. From the lean-to icebox he took a slab of ham, three eggs, cold cornbread, and a jar of buttermilk. He fried ham and eggs, heated the cornbread, and sat down in plain sight of her, eating with lip-smacking relish, and noisily slurping the buttermilk. "Good grub, old woman."

She said nothing, merely stared at him reproachfully.

Finished, Jake left the dishes where they were and went into the bedroom, where he stretched out. He was exhausted. He slept restlessly, waking up a couple of times and checking on the old woman. She was dozing, her head down on her chest.

In the morning he reluctantly helped her out to the privy in back. He didn't do it for her benefit, but for his own. Afterward, he hobbled her at the quilting frame again. Although she was noticeably weaker, she bent to her work again. He went through the same routine with his breakfast, sending frequent glances in her direction. She didn't look up from her work. He was baffled. He would have bet she would be whining for food and water by this time. But not a peep. Stubborn old woman!

During the rest of the day, he continued his search, but his heart was no longer in it. He knew now that he would never find her hoard

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on his own. In his frustration and anger, he toyed with the idea of torturing the information out of her. But if he did that, there would be signs and they'd come looking for him for murder when they found her dead. His idea had been to leave her dead without a mark on her, so they would think she had kicked off from natural causes.

She *couldn't* hold out much longer. She had to crack tomorrow or the next day.

At dark, when he went to unhobble her, Granny said, "It's finished now, ready for Alvin when he comes for it."

Jake looked idly at the finished quilt. Now she had put in a square with some kind of big flower. The pictures looked to Jake like something a little kid might draw.

When I drove up to the cabin the next morning, I was hoping Jake would have skedaddled, but he answered the door again, just a crack, wearing his ferret grin. He handed a folded quilt through the crack.

"This what you came for, ain't it, constable?"

I took the quilt. "I was hoping to speak to Granny."

"Nope, can't do it. She wore herself out finishing that quilt on time. Had to work late last night and she's sleeping now."

For a moment I was powerfully tempted to slam the door open and force my way in. But I had no cause to do that, nothing but a bad feeling about the whole thing. With a curt nod, I turned on my heel and stomped across the porch. I sat in my old car, glaring at the cabin. It seemed desolate, closed off, and that bad feeling still gnawed at me. Well, I would come back on grocery day, and if Jake was still there I would demand to see Granny.

With a clash of gears, I drove off down the mountain. When the cabin was out of sight, I glanced over at the quilt folded on the seat beside me. Suddenly I touched the brakes, steered to the side of the gravel road, and stopped.

Lifting the folded quilt, I looked at it. I was always curious about what Granny would do next. As I studied it, I realized it was one of her favorite patterns, one she had made up herself, and one that the customers were crazy about—Granny's Cabin.

Each picture square showed a little log cabin, the spitting image of Granny's own, with a big pine tree next to it, and on the porch was Granny herself in her rocking chair, sitting beside the open door. It was a perfect piece of work, as usual, but I heaved a sigh of disappointment, as if somehow I had been expecting something else.

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And then my breath caught as I took a second look. I was wrong—it wasn't the same, not quite. Right in the middle of the side facing me there was something different. Instead of a plain block on the left and right side of the Granny's Cabin square were other patterned squares, and they weren't Granny's Cabin squares.

Since working with Granny, I had become something of an expert myself, and the two squares did not belong there. The one on the left was an old pattern called Jacob's Ladder and the one on the right was a picture of a big pink rose.

It wouldn't have meant anything to anyone who wasn't familiar with it, but I knew that Granny called that particular pattern Granny's Treasure.

Then I looked real good at the Granny's Cabin square and saw that there was something different about it, too. The cabin door was shut and barred, and Granny's rocking chair was setting there empty on the tiny porch.

I shouted a dirty word, executed a U-turn, and roared back up the mountain.

As I skidded the car to a stop before the cabin, I reached into the glove compartment for my old .45, a gun I seldom fired except for target practice on rabbits and the like. I got out, hiding the .45 behind me in case Jake was looking out the window, and went up onto the porch. I knocked and waited.

Finally the door opened the usual crack and Jake peered out at me.

"What do you want now, constable?"

I lowered my shoulder and slammed into the door, sending it crashing open.

It caught Jake full force and sent him reeling back across the room. I charged in, the .45 in plain sight now. Jake landed on the floor, where he lay gaping up at me. My glance went from him to Granny, tied up in the rocker.

She smiled wanly and said in a barely audible voice, "Well, Alvin, it's about time."

I was too late to save her. With Jake handcuffed in the front seat and Granny unconscious in the back, I sped down the mountain to the hospital, but she died without ever regaining consciousness. The doctor said she had simply been too old and frail to survive going that long without food and water.

After her funeral, I learned the final irony when a lawyer showed

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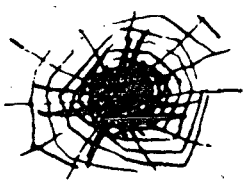
up at Heifer's Crossing. For years Granny had been socking her money away in the bank, which explained all those "shopping" trips into the city. It amounted to something over twenty thousand dollars, and it had been left in her will to her only living relative—Jacob Hicks.

If Jake had waited, the money would have been legally his. Now he can never inherit. He was tried for causing her death and was convicted. Jake is now serving a long, long term in our state prison.

Granny's last quilt? It still hangs in my store. Since it *was* her last quilt, I've been offered all kinds of money for it. I'm never going to sell it. You'll see it on that wall as long as I have anything to say about it.



DETECTIVERSE

UP, UP, AND AWAY!

by PATRICIA MATTHEWS

There was a mad bomber named Smitty,
Who plied his cruel trade without pity.
But one evening he goofed,
Was blown right through the roof,
Now Smitty's all over the city.

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a *NEW* short story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

This is the 39th story by Avram Davidson in EQMM. His first appeared in the December 1956 issue and another, "The Necessity of His Condition," won first prize in EQMM's Annual Contest (now long discontinued) the following year. In introducing the prize-winning story in the magazine, Frederic Dannay (Ellery Queen) called the author "a born storyteller" and "one of the most versatile writers ever to appear in EQMM." Thirty years have not changed that. On the contrary. Think O. Henry. Think Avram Davidson . . .

LOUIE AND THE LIBRARY

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Louie's father was the janitor in the shabby-genteel apartment house where Miss Meriwether lived on the third floor in an apartment filled—if not almost overfilled—with memories of an age much richer than our own.

Miss Meriwether was not very much aware of Louie, or, for that matter, very much else—except for the poems of Emily Dickinson, which she read and reread, and her will, which she changed often. However, from time to time noises would ascend even to the third floor, at which times, disturbed, Miss Meriwether would descend to the basement, where in a smaller apartment, equally crowded—though not all with memories—lived the janitor. And she would knock.

"Oh, Mr. Labonna. The noise."

"I'm sorry, lady," Labonna would answer, his dirty, mended eyeglasses clouded with sweat and tears of rage and shame. "My boy, he give me lodda trouble—he very bad boy, lady, very bad. I'm sorry,

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lady." This meant, although Miss Meriwether did not realize it, that Louie had been caught stealing again and that Labonna, whose views were perhaps simplistic, had been beating him up again.

"Oh, dear. Louis. Oh, my." Miss Meriwether produced a dime—a dime!—and extended it in Louie's direction. Louie would slide by his father, grab it, and run like hell. Miss Meriwether's vague and benevolent smile, her departure. Labonna, turning to Mrs. Labonna, who knew three hundred and eighty-one ways to cook noodles, cabbage, and potatoes and not a goddamned thing else, would open wide his arms in a gesture not of love but despair.

This happened often.

Finally, Louie got caught and sent to the reformatory.

Miss Meriwether grew just a trifle tired of Emily Dickinson and concentrated for a while on Sidney Lanier, with occasional dips into Celia Thaxter and—a big step for Miss Meriwether—Edna St. Vincent Millay. She kept on changing her will.

Louie got out of the reformatory.

"Why, Louis. Hello."

"Hello, Miss Marywedder."

"What do you think of doing now, Louis?"

Louie shrugged. "I dunno. I tought maybe I'd loin ta drive a truck."

Miss Meriwether considered. One felt a certain responsibility for the janitor's boy, now almost a young man. The word *truck* did not penetrate. "Louis—have you ever thought of joining the public library?"

"Whuddayamean?" he said suspiciously. She opened her purse, a gesture which he observed apathetically, no longer needing a dime even to slide past his old man's fist—Labonna knew when he was licked.

But it wasn't a dime that came out. It was a small rectangle. At the top were the words MUNICIPAL FREE LIBRARY. In the middle were a series of numbers. On the bottom half it said:

Miriam Meriwether
324 Hamlin Street
City

Louie held it in his hands. It seemed to fascinate him.

"I ain't got one," he said.

"But you can obtain one, Louis."

"Whuddayamean?"

"You do know where the public library is? Catercorner from the

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high school? Well, all you have to do is go in and apply. And they will issue you one."

He handed it back. "Tanks, Miss Marywedder." She went up the stairs, books under her arm, feeling faintly excited, faintly daring. *Amy Lowell!*

The librarian suppressed a sigh. "May I help you?" she said.

"I wanna liberry card."

"Do you have some identification?"

"Whuddayamean?"

"Do you have a driver's license?"

"I ain't got one."

"A Social Security card?"

"Notchett."

The librarian produced a postal card. "Well, just address this to yourself and we'll mail it. When you receive it, bring it back. That will indicate that you have a residence within the city." Louie had learned a number of things in recent years, whilst away from home, and one of them was how to write his name and address. "As soon as your permanent library card is ready, we'll mail it to you, Mr. Labonna," the librarian said.

"Tanks, lady."

He walked out very slowly, looking all around. He had not really realized that there were this many books in the world.

Meanwhile, although nobody wanted to teach him how to drive a truck, Louie ran errands and did odd jobs and kept his nose clean. Old Labonna, very slightly less discouraged, gave him a few dollars.

"Have you obtained your library card, Louis?"

"Come in taday's mail, Miss Marywedder. Look."

"There. Isn't that fine! Now, Louis, all the treasures of world literature are yours for the mere selecting!"

"Tanks, Miss Marywedder."

He watched her heading down the street, Amy Lowell under one arm, her big hat bobbing and nodding. Then he went up to the third floor. The library card was made out of the best goddamn plastic he had ever seen—it took him hardly any time at all to slide it between door and doorjamb and open the latch. Afterward, he hitchhiked to New Orleans, where, he had been assured by classmates, dwelt the most generous fences in the nation: perhaps a matter of opinion.

Miss Meriwether, who had been finding it increasingly difficult

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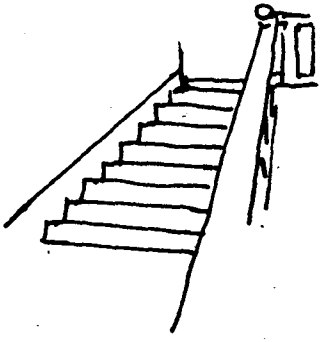
to bend, squat, stoop, or otherwise get the hatbox from under her bed, never noticed a thing. Eventually, her trustees did notice the absence of several pieces of the jewelry mentioned in her will—her wills, that is. There were eleven of them, all different, all unsigned.

As for Labonna, he dropped dead one night while stoking the furnace. His widow returned to her native country, where she moved in with her widowed sister and bought a cow and some pigs. Besides these, she has Social Security, and once a year Louie (who lives in a western state where he owns three trucks) sends her a hundred-dollar bill.

Whenever this happens, the neighbors smack their foreheads with the flats of their hands, cross themselves, and wish that they, too, might move to America, land of opportunity.



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Romero picked up her glass and with a cloth wiped away the spreading pools of moisture. "No salt," he said. "A margarita without salt is a day without sunlight . . ."

A MARGARITA WITHOUT SALT

by HELENE JUAREZ PHIPPS

In the blue light of the dying afternoon, the Cantina Paraiso was a lonely tavern.

"It's like a funeral in here," Maria said. She set down her glass on the mahogany countertop and made damp circles on the polished surface. "Maybe I shouldn't have said that." She looked over at two men who were silently drinking beer at the far end of the bar near the beveled-glass window.

To Romero, the bartender, she said, "Leave the salt off the next one."

He picked up her glass and with a cloth wiped away the spreading pools of moisture. "No salt," he said. "A margarita without salt is a day without sunlight."

"There was plenty of sun today. Too much if you ask me." Maria said. "It sure heated up that church and all the mourners. The only cool one was that girl in the casket."

"You went to the funeral, Maria?" Romero raised a greying eyebrow. The solid white streak that formed a part in his short-cropped black hair glinted from the overhead light that was tinged with violet from the fluorescent tubing.

"I attended the services," she said, "in place of my husband. He chickened out."

"Why should he have been there?" Romero asked.

"The whole thing was his fault. He was responsible."

Romero set a clean glass in front of her and filled it from the blender jar. He poured the last icy drops in the center of the mound of shaved ice. "How can you say that, Maria? You are only guessing."

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"You think I'm that dumb? Everyone in town knew about them. Of course—" she took a swallow of her drink "—I was only the last to know."

She shook her head, her mouth puckered as if she had bitten into a sour lemon. "It tastes bitter. Funny, I can still taste the salt."

"It's in your mind, Maria. There's no salt in that drink. And not on the glass."

"Well, you're not drinking it, I am. And it still tastes salty. Give me another." She pushed the glass toward him.

"No, Maria. You've had enough." Romero reached up to the top shelf behind the bar and brought down five tin candle holders with shields of hammered tin. He lit each candle, then set the miniature lanterns at equal distances along the bar. When he came back, he placed a bowl of salted nuts in front of Maria.

A long curl had escaped from the coil of black hair that formed a topknot on Maria's head. She brushed it back from her white face. Deep bluish circles beneath her obsidian eyes emphasized her unnatural pallor. "Give the nuts to those men. I'm not hungry. I want a better margarita or else make this one sweeter."

"Don't you think you should be getting home?"

"What for? I can't go back to Donovan now. Not after what he's done to me—and to her. They gave her a decent funeral, just like she deserved it. I can't get over that."

"Let it go, Maria. You've got your man back."

"They let her be buried from the church. They kept the coffin closed, though, so we couldn't see her face. The padre, he said nice words about her just like she was a normal—"

"She *was* normal, Maria. She was a decent girl. A little young, inexperienced. She didn't deserve to die."

"You men would all say that. But to me she's just a ghost. And she'll always spook me and Donovan."

"It's all over, Maria. You've got Donovan back. It won't work if you hold onto bitter memories."

The sheriff's car cruised slowly down the alley, a dark shadow, slinking toward the daylight beyond the brick-and-adobe walls. Maria watched it through the window until the car turned out toward Taos Plaza. The sun's rays glanced off the rear window and flashed a glowing signal of its departure from the scene.

"They're still looking for the kid, aren't they?" Maria said. "When do you think they'll let up?"

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"They can't let up until they find him—or whoever did it." Romero picked up a tray of glasses and placed them below the sink.

"Whoever did it shot her five, maybe seven times. It was as if they couldn't punish her enough." Maria picked up the cocktail napkin and rolled it into a ball. "I hope they don't find him," she said. "I could have liked that kid, that younger brother. I think he deserves some kind of award."

"You knew her brother?"

"I only met him that once, when he found me in the bakery. He told me, 'Keep your old man away from my sister.' His words hit me like a bolt of lightning. I left the shop and drove like a bat out of hell all over town looking for Donovan's car. And you know where I found it? In front of the little adobe house on La Vereda. The 'little house.' In Mexico, we'd call it *la casa chica*. Every married man has one. The little love nest, the sweet little hideaway. Here in New Mexico, men are supposed to take better care of their wives—at least the Anglos. The rest of them can't afford two households."

"He was a good kid, that one," Romero said. "He went to church most every Sunday. Communion, confession—"

"I guess he won't go to confession any more," Maria said.

"Why not?" Romero took a green visor from the drawer by the sink and put it on. He swirled it sideways so it only shaded one of his dark eyes.

"Everyone knows he killed his sister. What more could he tell the padre?"

"The padre has his vows of silence. He wouldn't spill anything to the police. Besides, how do you know the boy did it? No one saw him."

Maria ran her fingers around the rim of her glass, attempting to erase any trace of imagined salt. "Who else could have done it?" She wiped her fingers on the distorted napkin. Romero handed her another.

"The kid had to have killed her," she said. "It was in the family code. His sister had been dishonored. The old man, the father, was too old. It had to fall to the son."

"The whole family could have done it, any one of them," Romero said. "But there's no evidence, no one has been arrested. No one saw the shooting. At least, the whole family denies—"

"Not the whole family. It took only one gun, one trigger finger. It had to be the kid. It was his place. —He only made one mis-

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take—he should have caught two birds with the same number of bullets."

"You wouldn't want Donovan dead, Maria," Romero said.

"He's as good as," she answered.

"You know, Maria, this is a funny town. We're all related one way or the other."

"You can't say that. The Indios, the Anglos, the ones who claim to be Spaniards, the descendants of the first who came up from Mexico—we're all a race apart."

"I'm not talking about that, Maria. I'm saying we all look after one another. We all know each other's business."

"Then why didn't you tell me what was going on with that girl and my old man? I had to wait until I heard it from her side of the family."

"You should have suspected, Maria. You could have kept it quiet, settled it inside your own house. Unless—"

"Unless what? Unless he should have been better, oftener? You mean you're blaming me." She shoved her glass toward Romero. "Now that really calls for a double."

"I'll double," Romero said, "if you'll go home when you finish."

"I'll go when I'm good and ready." She watched as the sheriff's car circled back and headed toward the side entrance of the cantina. "Why don't the *perros* give up? They know the kid's not going to be hiding in here."

"How do they know that?"

"The family would hide him. They'd make sure he was stashed away in some safe place. We've got mountains and forests and canyons where they'd never find him in a million years. I'd hide him myself if he should come to me."

"Why would you do that, Maria?"

"Because he did me a favor. You know what I'd do if I found that kid? I'd throw my arms around him and give him a big *abrazo*. Then I'd take him out to our barn and bring him some good blankets. I'd fix him eggs with green chile and *sopapillas*. I'd reward him, Romero, for what he did. Who knows, I might even drive him out to California."

"Why, Maria?"

"Because he did what his heart told him to do."

Romero set the double margarita on the counter. "O.K.," he said. "You've got that off your chest. Now drink up and go home to Donovan. Be thankful you've got your man back all to yourself."

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"No," Maria said. She took a sip of her drink. "Not to myself, any more than when that girl was alive. She's right here, a ghost between us."

"You've got it all wrong. You're thinking crazy. Donovan needs you *now*. You can get him back." Romero reached for her glass. She put her hand on his and stopped him. Her begonia-pink nails bit into his flesh.

"Why should I go home and dry his tears?" She downed the drink in one gulp.

Romero took away the empty glass. He mopped up the countertop, pressing the cloth with an impassioned fervor. "He really needs you, Maria. More than ever."

"Maybe so. But no one, not even the padre, can exorcise the evil spirit who will always be between us. Can't you get that through your head?"

"Only you can push that ghost away from the two of you," Romero said.

"You think so? What if Donovan still wants to sleep with a ghost, to hold a dream in his arms? You think he'll want me to drive her out? Oh, no. He'll want to hold onto her."

"Not if you're there with him. You go, Maria. Go home to your man."

"One more drink for my nerves. Then I'll go."

The candles burned brighter up and down the bar. The two men left and the wind from outside hissed with the sound of the blender.

Romero poured the drink, more ice than liquor.

Maria swallowed it quickly. "I'm going. But you're wrong. We're never going to lose that wretched girl's spirit. She'll be with us forever."

With strong arms, Maria pushed her way out the door. The vicious wind slammed it closed behind her.

Through the light-sleeved sweater, she massaged her arm all the way to the big Harvester she had parked in the alley. All the margaritas in the world couldn't ease the pain from the recoil of the gun, nor the aftersmell of cordite that lingered in her nostrils.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER TURNBULL

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A solid and intriguing police procedural from Scotland from Peter Turnbull, whose solid and intriguing novels have earned him an enthusiastic following. This story, not only "new" as stated above but his first ever, will earn him more fans without the shadow of a doubt . . .

THE SORT OF MAN HE WAS

by PETER TURNBULL

It was as good a place to die as any. Here in the park with the tower of the University of Glasgow on the skyline there just behind the trees, the Art Gallery's magnificent stone edifice away to the right, and behind on the opposite side of Argyle Street the cavernous Kelvinhall, with red banners advertising the series of summer promenade concerts.

And the time of year was good, the full richness of a Scottish summer at the solstice, the lush greens of the lawns, and the heavy canopies of the trees. The sun which each night dips just beneath the horizon for a few hours, leaving the city in a state of crimson twilight before rising again at about 4:00 A.M., was just now high in blue, blue sky which had just a wisp of cloud away to the west. The birds sang in the trees, the Kelvin splashed and rippled beneath

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the bridge. Farther away, there were old men and women playing bowls, and the heavy satisfying thud of wood against wood echoed across the park while the younger men and women stretched out in beachwear. Closer at hand, beside a wide concrete path on a wooden bench, was death—the death of a human being.

In life it had been a man—tall, slender, but strong—who had achieved perhaps his forty-fifth year. He had died on the park bench, close to a second park bench which had been overturned and close to a flower bed which appeared to have been rolled on and trampled. As indeed did the dead man, who in death suffered the indignity of having his trousers falling in a crumpled heap around his ankles, leaving two long, thin, pale, utterly hairless limbs protruding from beneath his shirt tail, spreading wide at the knees before coming together again in a pile of brown tweed.

Police constable Phil Hamilton stood in his white short-sleeved shirt with one hand on the portable radio which hung at his waist. Close behind him, about a hundred feet away, a small crowd had gathered. A second crowd, also small in number, had collected about one hundred feet away along the path in the opposite direction. Occasionally, a man or woman who appeared to Hamilton to belong to what the sociologists called "the rough" would break from one crowd and walk quickly past Hamilton and the dead man. They would giggle as they walked, looking over their shoulder, seeking approval from their companions. In the old days, thought Hamilton, it must have been just such people who gaped at the public executions.

Suddenly, thankfully, the air was pierced by one—no, two klaxons. Hamilton turned and watched the arrival of a police van and a police car driving off Argyle Street into the park, forcing a path through the crowd. It could only have been two minutes or less since Hamilton had summoned assistance on his radio, perhaps a hundred and eighty seconds since he had bent over the man and felt for a pulse—on the wrist, as his wife, a nurse, had taught him, or just above and behind the ear, or at the side of the throat—and, finding none, opened the man's eyelids to see the two dull whites of eyes of a man who appeared to be deceased. It could only have been two hundred and thirty seconds since the breathless woman had tugged at his arm and pointed to the park, too distraught even to speak and too frightened to accompany him. She had just panted and pointed. Nevertheless, it seemed to Hamilton that he had been standing over

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the dead man for an age. Again he looked at him, and again he thought that if you have to go, then here, on such a day, was as good a place as any.

The room was twenty feet square. It had white painted walls and a floor covered with industrial-grade linoleum heavily sealed with disinfectant. It was strongly illuminated by two filament bulbs encased in transparent plastic to prevent "shimmer." Along two walls were cabinets and shelves containing instruments and glass jars. A small trolley also containing surgical instruments stood neatly in one corner. The third wall of the room was composed almost entirely of a pane of glass beyond which were ten rows of seats on an inclined plane, all at the moment empty. The room was entered by a door set in the fourth wall. In the center of the room a stainless-steel table stood on a single pedestal. This was the pathology laboratory in the basement of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary.

There were four men in the room. Detective Sergeant Raymond Sussock, who stood reverently in one corner. Dr. Reynolds, the tall silver-haired pathologist, who had earlier supervised the removal of the corpse from the locus of the offense shortly following the police surgeon's certification of death. The laboratory assistant, a small thin man with slicked-down hair, who, to Sussock, always seemed to have a sinister gleam in his eyes. The fourth man lay on the table, naked save for a towel draped over his "private parts." It was less than an hour since he had been found on the park bench with his trousers around his ankles.

"Male caucasian." Reynolds spoke in a normal matter-of-fact tone, each word being picked up by a small microphone which could easily be mistaken for a button in the lapel of his white coat and which was connected to a compact tape-recorder he carried in his pocket. "Aged approximately forty-five to fifty-five years. Identity—" he glanced at Sussock, who shook his head "—identity not known. Immediately obvious are injuries to the skull indicating repeated assault with an implement. Also damage to the skin tissue of the knuckles of the right hand. Time of death approximately two hours ago, plus or minus an hour—" Reynolds glanced at his watch "—that is to say between twelve-thirty and two-thirty P.M. this day the twenty-first of June."

Reynolds fell silent and began to examine the cuts and abrasions on the man's scalp and forehead. Then he spoke again, softly. "Bruising on the head appears to have occurred prior to the time of death,

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possibly by a factor of ten or twelve hours." He turned to Sussock. "That should explain why you have no witnesses to what by all accounts must have been a fine old rammy, Sergeant."

"Sir?" Sussock stepped one pace forward.

"My guess is that the deceased was assaulted and quite badly beaten up about ten or twelve hours before he died. He was attacked at about midnight last night, or shortly afterward. Then he sat on the park bench until he died. He would have looked like somebody sleeping in the sun. The trousers being down round his ankles are a bit of a puzzler, but that's for your department, as they say."

"Cause of death, sir?"

"All in good time, Sergeant." Reynolds smiled. "But I would think it was the head injuries which caused fatal brain damage. Death could have been caused by cerebral laceration, bits of bone working into the brain could cause death, but because of the time lapse which appears to have occurred between the attack and death I would be inclined to think death was caused by extradural hemorrhage —bleeding between the skull and the outer covering of the brain. It's often associated with a fractured skull and has a delayed-action effect—after a period of concussion the patient feels normal and indeed appears to be normal, but then a few hours later becomes uncoordinated in speech and movement, just as though he were drunk."

Reynolds took a small hand-held drill from the instrument trolley. "I'll test for it now by drilling into the skull near the area of the injuries here on his left side. If we tap into a reservoir of blood, that will be sufficient indication that death was caused by an extradural hemorrhage." He applied the drill, but without seeming to place any pressure on the instrument, as if allowing it to bite and pull its own way into the bone. Eventually there was no resistance and the drill fell through the skull. A jet of blood squirted out and splattered Reynolds' smock.

Sussock felt his stomach rise. He looked up at the ceiling and then glanced at the assistant with the slicked-down hair. The assistant was staring at the corpse and smiling.

"Extradural hemorrhage it is," said Reynolds as he placed the drill into a tray of disinfectant. "It was brought on by major and repeated trauma to the skull. The lesions have a linear quality and would seem to have been caused by a long piece of wood, for example. The injuries are on the left side of the head, indicating that the attacker was a right-handed person. The deceased appears to have

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put up a fight and bruised his knuckles in the process. He was also a right-hander in life. I'll scrape under his fingernails and his scalp to see if I can dig up any clue as to his identity or maybe the identity of the attacker or attackers. That will be included in my report."

"I couldn't help but notice him," said the man.

P.C. Hamilton wrote slowly and laboriously in his pad. At the front of each new notebook he wrote, "what, why, when, where, how, who," and mentally crossed out each interrogative as he covered it.

"Stuck in my mind all afternoon," said the man, middle-aged and portly, smelling of oil and grease and good honest sweat. "Seeing a bloke stagger away from the hospital and into the park, trying to hold up his trousers and eventually letting them slip from his fingers, shuffling up to a bench and dragging them up round his ankles."

"What sort of time was this?"

"About midday. I can't be more specific." The man wiped his brow and glanced out of the window of the interview room. "I was stuck in a jam in Argyle Street and watched this guy stagger away from the hospital. Then I heard on the radio in the truck that you were looking for witnesses, so when I finished the trip I told the boss and he said I could take time off to see you."

"Good of you," Hamilton nodded. "Did you see anybody else acting suspiciously?"

"No." The man shook his head. "Most folk avoided him, staggering like he was. I reckon they thought he was drunk—like I did until I heard on the radio that he died and you were treating the death as suspicious."

Sussock returned to P Division police station at Charing Cross and in a cold rage read the statement taken by Hamilton. He glanced at his watch. It was 4:00 P.M. He had arranged to see Chief Inspector Donoghue at 4:30 P.M. He had just time to get to the Rottenrow Infirmary next to the park, away from which at midday a dying man had been seen to stagger.

There was a male charge-nurse on duty at casualty reception. He was maybe twenty years old. He was sitting at the desk reading a cheap novel with a lurid cover. Sussock dropped copies of the photographs of the deceased on the desk.

"Seen him before?" Sussock asked, showing his I.D.

The young man picked up the photographs disinterestedly. "No."

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"Look again."

He looked again. "Should I have seen him?"

"Midday today. Were you on duty then?"

"Yeah. —Oh, yeah. He was drunk."

"Drunk," echoed Sussock.

"Yeah. This old guy comes in holding up his pants, staggering about the place. He could hardly say a word. Had a good drink in him right enough. I showed him the street."

"Good at your job, aren't you?"

"I try to be," the young man said with a sick smile.

"He was dying," said Sussock. His words echoed like a bell on a still, dark night. "Ever heard of a condition called extradural hemorrhage? You might want to look it up when you've finished your recreational reading. You might also want to have your answers ready, because we'll be making a formal complaint about hospital procedure which allows people like you to make life and death decisions."

Sussock met briefly and uncomfortably with Detective Inspector Donoghue, and reported to the well dressed man who was fifteen years his junior the depressingly little progress he had made.

"So," said Donoghue, laying his pipe with its slightly curved stem inside a huge black ashtray on his desk. "Fingerprints didn't help, forensic still to report on the clothes. We've taken casts of the fingerprints in the flower bed, one of which—and only one—clearly belonged to the deceased. Really all we know is that it's a murder inquiry."

"That's about it, sir." Sussock glanced out the window at the tall, angular, concrete-and-glass buildings of the new Glasgow and the older, solid tenements, the warehouses, the cranes, the Clyde, all shimmering in a heat haze.

"Next step is the missing-person's file," said Donoghue. "Get somebody on it. Also get somebody out on the streets to see if there are any whispers." He looked at the elderly, craggy-faced Detective Sergeant and raised his eyebrows.

Outside Donoghue's office on the C.I.D. corridor, Sussock and W.P.C. Elka Willems walked toward each other. Elka Willems was tall. She wore her blonde hair in a bun while on duty and, bearing many of the characteristics of her Dutch ancestry, always managed to look devastatingly attractive in the unflattering police uniform. She and Sussock stopped, exchanged glances, and then walked on.

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Sussock spoke to Detective Constables King and Montgomerie and then signed out and went home. Three hours' overtime on this shift: almost home on time.

In his case, home was a bedsitter in the West End where he shared a kitchen with people who regularly pilfered his food. He sat in a deep armchair sipping a mug of tea. It was hardly accommodation for a senior police officer, but it was temporary, just until his divorce came through, and it was infinitely better than sharing the lavish bungalow in Rutherglen with his pinched-face shrew of a wife and their son, who had returned from London with a set of lacy underwear and who used his mother's lotion to take the hair from the backs of his hands.

Luck, as it occasionally seemed to be, was in for Richard King. He had taken all the files on missing persons (males) aged between forty-five and sixty years, sat at a desk with a beaker of steaming coffee and a photograph of the deceased, and found the file on the dead man within thirty seconds. His shock at finding it at all was outweighed only by his shock at finding it so easily. Yet there it was—the photograph on the inside of the file was definitely that of the man who had died that afternoon in Kelvingrove Park.

It was a cleaner face, less creased with worry and younger-looking, but it was definitely the same man. He was, according to the file, a businessman, one Simon Badger, aged fifty-four when he disappeared but looked younger, home address 1197 Hamilton Park Avenue, Kelvinbridge. It wasn't more than one mile from where he died. What surprised King was the date that the file had been opened—nearly two years previously. Simon Badger lived at a prestigious address, he was a businessman. He disappeared and then turned up two years later on a park bench ten minutes' walk from his home with his skull battered and splintered. King returned the remainder of the files to the collator and signed Simon Badger's file out to himself, reflecting how fortunate that he hadn't decided to attack the files in reverse alphabetical order as he sometimes did, just for the change.

Hamilton Park Avenue strikes at ninety degrees off Great Western Road, the four-lane main drag out of Glasgow toward the highlands and islands and the heather and the castles. The avenue is a terrace development for four-storey houses and, as the name implies, suitably tree-lined. The avenue is, as urban planners might say,

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"in transition." The houses on the avenue are still huge family dwellings or have been divided into three flats bought by "young, upwardly mobile professionals" or have been divided into an even greater number of bedsitters, occupied by students or unemployed single parents. Two buildings are converted into "hotels" filled by the city with homeless persons. The avenue is a Grade A-listed terrace. Built between 1850 and 1857, it is considered to be of outstanding architectural importance and the houses, therefore, cannot be demolished or structurally altered. Damage and wear-and-tear has to be made good, and while the city will provide financial assistance for major repair, much else is the financial responsibility of the owner. It can cost deep into the purse to live on Hamilton Park Avenue.

Number 1197 stood on the corner of the avenue farthest away from Great Western Road and looked out above the richly forested valley of the Kelvin walkway. There were just two doorbell buttons on the front door, almost the pinnacle of social prestige on the avenue when compared with the battery of twenty or so on the front doors of the houses which had been split into bedsitters. King was accompanied by the tall and slender W.P.C. Elka Willems, who towered a good six inches above the chubby, bearded detective constable. The lower of the two bells was marked *Badger* and amused both Richard and Elka by ringing the Westminster chime when pressed.

The door was opened as the last note of the peal was receding into the hall. A lady in her late forties stood on the threshold. Her hair was greying and her head seemed to be beginning to sink on her shoulders. She wore a lightly woven yellow dress.

"Mrs. Badger?" asked King.

"Yes." She had a strong, firm voice.

"We're police officers." He showed her his I.D. "Can we talk to you for a moment? It's about your husband."

"Have you come to tell me he's dead?"

"Yes," said King, "I'm afraid we have."

The woman put her hand up to her mouth and her eyes began to water. She rocked unsteadily on her feet. Elka Willems stepped forward to support her.

The Badgers owned the basement and ground floor of 1197, about ten rooms in all—with wide corridors, staircases, and Corinthian columns supporting the roof. The hallway smelled of flowers and polish, and the tranquil silence was broken only by a reassuring

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ticking of an old clock. Mrs. Badger took the two cops into a room she called the upstairs living room, which smelled a little musty and seemed to be used solely for entertaining callers.

"I knew it myself he was dead," she said, "when he didn't call for a few days. I knew then that Simon was dead."

"But he's been missing for nearly two years, Mrs. Badger."

"I know, I know." She dabbed her eyes with a small handkerchief. "Where did you find the body?"

"In Kelvingrove Park."

"He was lying there for two years?" Mrs. Badger looked aghast at King.

"Mrs. Badger," said King as delicately as he could while Elka braced herself for the reaction to come, "your husband died early this afternoon."

Mrs. Badger's reaction was not the most emotive outburst Elka Willems had ever witnessed, but she thought it one of the most memorable. She watched color drain from the woman's face as the full significance of Richard's words sank in: that she had not been widowed for two years, but deserted. Mrs. Badger sobbed quietly at first, then loudly, uncontrollably. It was some considerable time before the interview could proceed, and when it did Mrs. Badger was a different woman, speaking with a note of bitterness in her voice, a note which grew stronger and clearer and harsher by the minute.

"I used to think how lucky he was to have seen the children up and away before he died. I thought he'd slipped into the Clyde or something. He was a keen fisherman and his tackle was found near the tail of the bank. Now it seems he'd planned it all along, waiting until the children had marriages of their own before he deserted. My God, the cunning of it."

"What did your husband do for a living, Mrs. Badger?" King asked. "We just have him down as a businessman."

"That's as near as you'll ever get," said the woman, whose face as well as voice seemed to be hardening. "He had a finger in a lot of pies, he was a Mister Ten Percent. He used a phrase to describe himself—'a bit of this and a bit of that.' It was annoying never knowing exactly what he did, but whatever it was he was very good at it. The house is bought and paid for, and when he disappeared there was money enough in the joint account. We have never been short."

"Where did he work? Did he have a particular business associate?"

"I answered these questions to the police who called after I re-

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ported him missing." The woman looked at King with cold, hard eyes. "No, he didn't seem to have a regular business partner, just lots of contacts or acquaintances. He had a room just across the landing as his office. It is left as it was on the day he disappeared. I haven't touched a thing."

Simon Badger had requisitioned the largest room on the ground floor as his office. It was half as big again as the upstairs sitting room and seemed to be kept in an ordered and shipshape manner. A random glance at an accounts ledger showed King that he was used to dealing in "strong beer." Ten thousand pounds was one of the smaller sums entered in the columns and many entries were in excess of five figures. There were also address books with names, addresses, and telephone numbers with an international flavor and a contact with a Merchant Bank of which King had not previously heard.

It was all gold dust to a working cop, but King knew he had to temper his enthusiasm. While the reason Simon Badger had one day taken his fishing tackle down to the riverbank and then walked away into a new life might well be hidden amongst his papers, the reason for his murder might not. Parks in any city are different places in the hours of darkness and Glasgow is no exception. The city had her share of park homosexuals and her share of thugs who prey on them. It was a summer's night, Simon Badger had strolled in the unlit park in short sleeves and baggy trousers. Two, maybe more thugs saw him as fair game and roughed him up. One of the thugs had a length of wood. Simon Badger had fought back, and in the rammy a flower bed was trampled, a park bench had been overturned, and Simon Badger was left senseless in the pansies. End of story.

But that Simon Badger met his death because he was unwise enough to walk in the park at night was only one possibility; that there was a motive and a premeditation behind his murder was another. King slowly and patiently began to leaf through the address book, copying the names and addresses of Badger's Glasgow contacts.

Malcolm Montgomerie walked down Maryhill Road with long effortless strides—six feet tall, broad-chested, flat stomach, down-turned moustache. He had been in the Auld Hoose, a pillbox of a bar concrete and angular, standing in the middle of wasted ground, entered by metal doors. Inside there was no natural light and the

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worn tartan carpet was permanently soaked with spilled alcohol. It took the length of one whisky for Montgomerie's eyes to become used to the gloom. It was only after a second that he was satisfied Tuesday Noon wasn't in the bar.

So he walked down Maryhill Road to the Gay Gordon at St. Georges. The Gay Gordon was a small bar—old style, one single room with tables and chairs fastened to the floor with chains, as much to stop punters furnishing their own homes with them as it was to prevent their use as weapons during a sudden rammy. High on the wall was a television with both the color and the sound turned up too loud. The barman at the gantry was a tough-looking geezer with a scar on his forehead and a look in his eyes which said clearly that he didn't like cops in the sawdust. Two boys sat together on the bench near to where a deep slash was exposing the padding. They stared into nothing, smashed on cheap junk.

Tuesday Noon sat in the corner and grinned a toothless grin in Montgomerie's direction. Montgomerie walked to the gantry and bought two whiskys. Being served them in a cold, efficient manner, Montgomerie took the drinks over to Tuesday Noon and placed one in front of him. Noon grabbed the glass and drained it in one. Montgomerie caught a blast of the man's hot breath as he poured water from the jug into his own drink. Tuesday Noon pushed the glass toward Montgomerie.

"Still as optimistic as ever, eh, Tuesday?" said Montgomerie. "You know the score—come up with the goods and you get a drink." Tuesday Noon's heavily whiskered face remained fixed in a grin. His mouth was a dark hole with one or two yellow teeth poking up or down. Montgomerie's nose twitched. It was a hot day in an airless bar and Tuesday Noon was particularly high.

"What is it you'll be wanting, Mr. Montgomerie?"

"Anything you know about a bloke being rolled in Kelvingrove Park late last night."

Tuesday Noon's face still remained fixed in an open-mouthed grin.

"They topped him, so it's murder. Sad thing is he went to the infirmary and they turned him away, and his state of shock was such that the only place he could think of to go was back to the place where he'd been jumped. It could have been done by neds thinking the guy was a park fairy, but he could've been targeted for a motive. It's a possibility we're chasing up. Just what you hear, Tuesday." Montgomerie drained his glass and stood. "If it pays, there'll be money in your pocket . . ."

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Richard King and Elka Willems left Mrs. Badger being comforted by a neighbor and having agreed to accompany a police officer to the mortuary later that day to make a formal identification of her husband's body. Richard wrote up his report and made a copy of the list of Simon Badger's Glasgow contacts and slipped both into the priority typing tray. Then he phoned home, a brief call to his patient, never-complaining Quaker wife Rosemary, to tell her he'd come on duty and landed in the middle of a murder inquiry and so he couldn't say when he'd be home. She said, "Of course, dear. Thank you for phoning."

He placed the phone down,and pictured her sitting alone in the living room, which had been stripped of its wallpaper six months ago and he still could find no time to redecorate. She would be reading, utterly eschewing television. The children at this time in the afternoon would be taking a nap. He would take his family on holiday this year, but it was already June and his diary was full for three weeks to come.

Fabian Donoghue, in his office, also put the phone down, also after phoning his family in Edinburgh. The phone had been answered by his daughter Louise, just nine years old and very confident on the phone, maybe to the point of being precocious, an issue he would take up with his wife. When his wife came to the phone, he also indicated the likelihood of his working late. She groaned loudly and said she'd leave a casserole in the oven.

Malcolm Montgomerie left the Gay Gordon, hailed a taxi, and went to the West End of the city. He went into a chromium-plate and orange-colored, dimly lit bar and stood by the polished-marble black gantry. Most of the punters were young, jostling each other, pushing money into the juke machines, smoking long expensive-looking cigarettes. In a corner was a group of older men in flat caps, huddling together as far as possible from the beep-beep-beep of the space-invader machine. The city's new-style bars had no place for the old-style patrons and they rested uneasily in their new environment, a species on the verge of extinction. Presently she saw him—long and leggy, Veronica by name.

She smiled, finished serving a young man who dripped with money, and came over to Montgomerie, leaning slender arms on the gantry.

"What'll it be?"

"Whisky," he said.

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She brought him a drink. He laid two notes down. "One for yourself."

She pursed her lips into a kiss.

"What time do you finish?"

"Seven o'clock." She glanced at her watch. The watch was so small Montgomerie had assumed it to be a bracelet. "About three hours from now. Been on without a break since eleven this morning."

"Long enough," said Montgomerie.

"You'll be coming round later?"

"That's what I called to speak to you about."

Veronica smiled, sighed, smiled again, and went away to serve a man who was waving a five-pound note in the air.

Fabian Donoghue sat back in his chair and pulled gently on his pipe, enjoying the tobacco, a special mix made up for him by his tobacconist, a Dutch base with a twist of dark shag for depth of flavor and a slower-burning rate. He read over King's report, impressed by the thoroughness and the way King had put himself into the report. It served to strengthen his opinion that King was bursting out of a Detective Constable's rank and was all but wearing a Sergeant's hat.

He glanced down the list of names. None meant anything to him, although he was intrigued by one name: Lorna—946–1126. There was one black mark against King, he thought, being that he could have taken the investigation further. Keeping your senior informed is all well and good, but not at the expense of losing momentum and of showing an unwillingness to take initiative. He picked up the phone and dialed a two-figure internal number.

"King," he said when the phone was answered, "D.I. Donoghue here. I've just been looking over your report. Very thorough. Do you have a list of names? Good. Phone them down to the collator, will you, please—see if we know any of them? When you've done that, get onto British Telecom, explain that this is a murder inquiry and ask them to place this telephone number belonging to one Lorna. I have a feeling it could be very productive. Thank you."

At his desk in the C.I.D. rooms, King replaced the telephone receiver. He felt gauche and wondered why he hadn't seen the next two most obvious steps to take with the list of names. He reached for the phone.

British Telecom came back within ten minutes. 946–1126 was the number of a coin-operated telephone on Clouston Street. King

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groaned. Clouston Street, breadline canyon, bedsitters crammed into crumbling, rotten, infested tenements. The phone was registered in the name of Chesney, which meant it was inside a flat and not a public telephone. Then the collator came back. Two of the names were known to the police in respect of criminal offenses. King scribbled the details, although he knew that a computer printout would soon be sent up to him. He wrote: "Ian 'Mistletoe' McGinley, aged 50—previous convictions for fraud, embezzlement. 'Mad' Max Scrimgear, 47 yrs. Files also for fraud, embezzlement."

Both had prestigious addresses south of the water. Neither had any convictions in the last five years. In a further two years without any convictions their names would be removed from the computer.

King went along the corridor and laid the information before Donoghue. Donoghue pulled on his pipe, mused, and then said, "All right, let's see the girl first. At least she and Badger seem to be on first-name terms."

Richard King and Malcolm Montgomerie called at the address on Clouston Street. They went into the close. It was dusty, unswept, littered with domestic refuse. The floor was uneven, as indeed was the stair, which seemed buckled at odd angles with no apparent means of support for each of the flagstones as it wound round the central well of the close.

Once, the tenements in the street would have been much-sought-after property, the houses of bankers and lawyers and doctors. Now, with time and the presence of newer housing on the fringe of the city, they housed the cast-off population, the out-of-work, the drug-addicted, all living on welfare. Over time, the solid building had become unsafe, as hundreds of feet below the surface the disused mine-workings caved in, whereupon the hundreds of tons of masonry which comprised the building would shift, twist, and settle again until the next cave-in. The building stood at an odd angle, the edifice clearly leaning back from the vertical, and had the eerie silence possessed by all structures on the verge of collapse.

The two cops started up the stair keeping close to the wall, as seemed safer. Chesney was the first name on a list of names pinned to the storm door on the second-floor right. "Recognize any of them?" King said.

Montgomerie shook his head and pressed the buzzer. He pressed it twice more before they heard the drawing of bolts and then the

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opening of the main door of the flat, followed by a female voice shouting, "Who is it?"

"Police," said King.

There was a second drawing of bolts and the narrow storm doors were opened. A young woman in T-shirt and jeans cut into shorts blinked at them.

"Lorna in?" asked King, holding up his I.D.

"Lorna?" said the woman.

"Lorna," said Montgomerie.

"Don't know no Lorna," said the woman. An aggressive male voice from deep in the apartment shouted, "Who is it?"

"Polis," said the young woman, half turning her head, "looking for some chick called Lorna."

The policemen watched the man come down the corridor. He was in his thirties and dressed only in jeans, naked from the waist up and barefoot. He stopped to light the stub of a cigarette and approached the door blowing smoke in the direction of the two cops. "Don't stay here no more," he announced with a helpful smile.

"When did she move out?" said King.

"And where to?" added Montgomerie.

"To the first question I answer about two years ago. To the second I answer I know not."

"She went off with her fancy man," said the young woman. "If it's the Lorna I think you're on about. Sorry I didn't click at first, but like Billy's just after saying it's been two years."

"Fancy man?"

"Businessman—rich, older than her. Guess she liked the father-figure bit."

"She didn't leave a forwarding address?"

"No," said the man. "Looking back on it, she seemed to have been planning it well ahead. She never got any mail for the last two months of her stay here as I remember, except her giro check. She was on the dole like everybody else. It's as though she had her mail rerouted to her mother's house."

"Which was where?"

"Balfron. Other than that I don't know."

"Then one day she gives a week's notice and she's off. Never seen again," the woman added.

"Not reported missing, by any chance?"

"No, not by us," said the man. "Not by anyone, I guess. The polis

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never came round asking after her. I guess she told her pals where she was at."

"Age?"

"Then, about nineteen."

"Always unemployed?"

"Not always. Once worked as a secretary for a guy she called the biggest crook in Glasgow. Mind, there's a lot who could compete for that title."

"Name?"

The man looked at the floor but the woman said, "McGinley. He had a Christmassy sort of nickname—Holly, Ivy, something like that."

"Mistletoe?" suggested King.

Ian "Mistletoe" McGinley's front was a builders' supplies depot in the unfashionable part of Yorkhill, close to the river, surrounded by car breaker's yards and traveling people's caravans. The gate was open and King drove the car into the yard and parked it by a Jaguar, which was itself parked up against a portacabin. A man opened the door of the portacabin and glared at the policemen. He was well set, in a grey suit, and wore an expression of disgust in a tight-mouthed face as he watched the two men approach. "We're just closing," he said. "Come back tomorrow."

"That's okay," said Montgomerie. "We're not buying anything."

The big man pushed out his chest and began to walk toward them. "Police," King said and he stopped in his tracks.

"Oh, yeah," he said.

"Like to ask you some questions," explained King.

The man turned and spoke to somebody behind him. Then he stepped aside and two neds skipped out of the cabin and walked rapidly past the cops, averting their eyes. One was pushing a roll of five-pound notes into his pocket as he walked by. They were stocky, short-haired, and unshaven. One was ginger, the other was dark-haired, and they wore leather jackets impregnated with studs. The ginger-haired one had painted HATE on the back of his jacket. Montgomerie stopped him as he went past and he glared at Montgomerie with undisguised loathing. "Been in a fight?" said Montgomerie. King had also noticed the black eye and dried blood inside the boy's nostrils. The ned stepped aside and walked quickly away without saying anything.

"Friendly company you keep," said King to the man.

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"Couple of lousy no-goods. I took them on and I paid them off."

"Paid them off," repeated Montgomerie and the big man glared at him, cheeks reddening.

"What is it you want?"

"Ian McGinley." King flashed his I.D.

"That's me."

"We'd like a question-and-answer session," said Montgomerie. "Can we come in?"

It was a cramped site office, a girlie calendar on the wall, a desk with a typewriter, a grey filing cabinet. There was a smaller office within the portacabin into which the cops were not invited.

"We'll try not to keep you long." King took out his notebook.

"It's about Lorna," said Montgomerie.

King noticed that McGinley looked immediately relieved. His face even relaxed into a smile. "Lorna," he said. "I thought—"

"Thought what?"

"Nothing. I thought it may have been serious—you know, my wife hurt, one of my sons in a car smash, that sort of number."

"No, it's about Lorna," said Montgomerie.

"I don't know of a Lorna."

"She used to work for you, about two years ago."

"Oh Lorna—that Lorna. Lorna Fawcett. Yes, I remember her."

"Home address, please," said King.

"I can't remember."

"It'll be in your files," said Montgomerie.

McGinley continued to hesitate until King said they could call back with a search warrant—such was the importance attached to locating Lorna Fawcett. Then McGinley went into the smaller office and came back with Lorna Fawcett's home address and phone number out in the Campsie Fells at Balfron.

While King was copying down the phone number and address, and without looking up at McGinley, he said, "It's also about Simon Badger." He felt McGinley stiffen and heard him draw in a short breath between clenched teeth.

"Know him?" asked Montgomerie.

"Not for some time;" said McGinley.

Sensible, thought King. It would have been foolish to deny knowing him.

"I had business dealings with the man."

"Business dealings?" King raised bushy eyebrows.

"He arranged insurance for me. It was one of the things he did.

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He got me inexpensive cover with a reliable company, the Ayrshire and General. They paid out after I was robbed."

"Not bad," said King. "You haven't seen him recently?"

McGinley shook his head. "Not for over two years."

"Don't know why anyone would want to murder him?" asked Montgomerie.

"Murder!" McGinley's face went from white to red and back to white again. He began to rock on his feet and had to steady himself against the desk. "No, no I don't."

"Well, thanks anyway," said King. "We'll see ourselves out."

The soft female voice on the other end of the phone wasn't at all the voice King had imagined. He had, for some reason, expected to speak to an immature, nervous girl, but Lorna Fawcett, he was pleased to discover, seemed calm and self-confident. The only emotion she showed when he informed her of the identity of the man who had been murdered earlier that day and which had been reported in the first edition of the *Evening Times* was silence—a long silence, which was more eloquent than Mrs. Badger's histrionics. Eventually she said, "How can I help you?"

"By telling us everything you know about Simon Badger."

After another short pause she said, "Yes, of course, but not on the phone."

"Certainly. Can we call on you at your home?"

"I'd rather you didn't. Mother, you see. There's a pub in the village—The Bear and Billet. It'll be quiet at this time in the evening. Say about an hour from now? I'll be sitting alone and wearing a straw hat."

She was wearing a straw hat, with a pale-blue ribbon and matching sky-blue blouse and pleated skirt, white tights, and white shoes. She sat in the corner over a richly polished table with a window behind her. A glass of colorless liquid sat on the table in front of her. She smiled a brief smile of a woman with nothing to hide and nothing to fear as King and Montgomerie approached her.

"Mr. King," she said.

King shook her hand and introduced Montgomerie.

"A gin and tonic," said Miss Fawcett and Montgomerie padded back across the carpet to the bar. "So it was Simon," she said as King sat opposite her, careful to lean back so as not to seem intimidating. All the indications were that this member of the public would, as is known in cop-speak, be "fully cooperative."

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"I'm afraid so," said King. "Were you close at all?"

"Lovers, I daresay you'd call us. Which is why I preferred to talk here rather than in the house. Mother would not approve. She thought I had a good job in Edinburgh and a nice flat all to myself."

"You don't seem upset, Miss Fawcett." King edged over sideways to allow Montgomerie to sit with them.

"Thank you," Lorna picked up her drink. "I'm not upset, Mr. King. I'll miss Simon, but we were drifting apart as a couple. I don't think we were ever totally suited to each other, but we met at a time that we both needed each other."

"That was about two years ago?"

"Yes. I was living in a damp bedsit and working for a real tyrant."

"McGinley?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"We do our homework."

"He's a crook," she said. "Verbally abusive. Overworks his staff. Underpaid us. Simon was living with a woman who was off her head."

"Mrs. Badger?"

"His wife, yes. She has a mental health condition, always in and out of psychiatric hospitals. He'd been surviving with her for years, existing on a day-to-day basis until the youngest of their children were up and away. He said that life with her was intolerable, that she wasn't the woman he'd married."

"Mrs. Badger didn't impress us as mentally ill," said King.

"She apparently has good periods which last a few weeks. She can present herself well to strangers for a few minutes—maybe up to an hour."

"I see."

"We met when Simon was doing some work for McGinley—arranging insurance, I believe. We saw each other and we had an affair. We had 'frisson' in those days." She fell silent and sipped her drink. King glanced out of the window and watched an overweight, shabbily dressed man clamber awkwardly out of a gleaming Rolls Royce. The Bear and Billet was beginning to fill for the evening. "Well, to put it bluntly, I helped Simon steal money from McGinley."

"Steal?"

She nodded. "It's not as bad as it sounds. There was always a lot of money in the office. It appeared and disappeared, often in suitcases. It was dirty money, you could see that. McGinley was a crook," she repeated.

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"So what happened?"

"Well, Simon arranged an insurance cover for McGinley. McGinley then arranged to have his own yard robbed. They knocked out the watchman, broke down the gate, loaded a lot of bricks and timber and roofing felt onto a lorry and drove off. They unloaded it all on a builder someplace who paid McGinley for it at cost price. In cash. McGinley then reported the theft to the police—you gentlemen—who investigated but didn't get far because he'd covered his tracks so well. Eventually he claimed the insurance. He got about fifty thousand pounds."

"Simple and time-tested fraud," said King.

"Simple and easy," she said. "I knew what had happened. He was edgy before the raid and I took a lot of calls for him which he could only answer in his little office behind my desk—not his usual practice. I told Simon, who was angry. He felt he'd let the insurance company down. Then we sort of hatched a plot to steal money from McGinley. I daresay we stepped on the wrong side of the law."

"I daresay you did," said King.

"We were desperate. We wanted to beat McGinley at his own game. It wasn't his money."

"It wasn't yours, either." King found himself liking Lorna Fawcett less by the minute.

She looked at him with cold eyes, not at all liking his rebuke. "To cut a long story short, Simon changed his name quietly. He put an ad in an obscure newspaper to the effect that from this day Simon Badger will be known as Simon Fox. That was a joke—one animal to another, you see. Apparently all you need to do in Scotland if you wish to change your name is to make a public declaration, such as an ad in a newspaper. It's quite legal so long as there's no criminal motive or you're not attempting to escape criminal or civil proceedings. Then he took his fishing rod and went down to the river—at the tail of the bank, I think—set up his rod on its rest, left a knapsack with some possessions, including Simon Badger's wallet, and went back into Glasgow as Simon Fox.

"He had enough money to support himself for a few weeks and he took a flat in Aberdeen. We kept in touch and I told him when McGinley had taken delivery of a suitcase full of money. Simon came down from Aberdeen and just brazened into the office when he saw McGinley was at the bottom end of the yard taking stock and brazened out again carrying the suitcase. There was about thirty thousand pounds in the case."

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She drained her glass. Neither cop felt inclined to ask her if she would like another drink.

"McGinley was furious. He didn't suspect me, because I was with him at the time taking notes. He went on a head hunt for a while, but he never reported it to the police. So it really was dirty money. Simon came clean—it's the sort of man he was. He phoned McGinley and apologized for helping himself to the money. McGinley went looking for him but by then Simon was already a missing person and his wife was gaga in hospital. There was nothing he could do."

"What happened then?"

"Simon and I lived together in Aberdeen as Mr. and Mrs. Fox. He used McGinley's money to start a brokerage. We kept our heads above water for a month or two. Then Simon was asked to arrange cover for a company that supplied equipment to the oil rigs in the North Sea—he had his foot in the door of the oil business. One contact led to another and pretty soon he was making money hand over fist.

"Simon was always bothered that he'd used stolen money to start his brokerage, and so two days ago he withdrew thirty-five-thousand pounds from the company account and put it in a suitcase and we traveled to Glasgow with it yesterday. He was going to pay McGinley back plus interest. We went to a phonebox at Queen Street Station and Simon phoned McGinley. I could hear McGinley screaming down the phone. He didn't want Simon at the yard or at his home. Eventually he agreed to meet at midnight—midnight last night."

"Where?"

"Kelvingrove Park, between the war memorial and the Art Gallery. Simon didn't phone me this morning as arranged. Then I read about the man being attacked in the park. I knew then that it was Simon. Your phonecall just comfirmed it."

"Would you have come forward if we hadn't traced you?" King asked.

"No." Lorna Fawcett shook her head. "I don't think so."

In the sitting room of a vast house on the south side of Glasgow, a house fortified like a castle with burglar alarms, dogs, and a wire fence, McGinley sat in a chair and wrung his hands.

"You can make it easy for yourself or you can make it hard," said King.

"You had some neds work Simon Badger over," said Montgomerie. "Only they murdered him, so it's complicity to murder."

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"You'll never make that stick."

"All we have to do is find the neds you hired. I think we already saw them getting paid off this afternoon."

"So go find them."

"It won't be that hard," said King. "When a couple of thugs like that pick up a suitcase containing thirty-five-thousand pounds, they don't keep their heads down too well."

"What do you mean?" McGinley looked at King as though some awful truth was slowly dawning.

"Simon Badger wanted to meet you to hand back the money he borrowed from you two years ago, and he was giving you interest. It was apparently the sort of man he was. But he was murdered by the two dogs you set on him. They took his wallet and any other I.D. and the suitcase he was carrying. Then they called round later today and calmly demanded payment. How much did you give them? A hundred pounds each?"

McGinley's head sank forward.

"Like I said," said King, "they'll be doing nothing but drawing attention to themselves. If we find them before you tell us who they are and where we can find them and they spill and implicate you, then it's bad news for you."

"Very bad," said Montgomerie.

"I don't know their names." McGinley didn't look up. "I found them in some bar, The Turk's Head, in Partick. You know what they look like."

"Get your jacket, McGinley," said Montgomerie. "You're coming for a ride."

King parked the car outside the Turk's Head. He and Montgomerie stepped out of the car. A van pulled up behind them. Six uniforms got out of the van. Tuesday Noon stood grinning by the door of The Turk's Head.

"You got my message then," he said as Montgomerie approached the door.

"Frankly, no," said Montgomerie.

"I phoned up. They said you were out. I left a message. The guys you want are in there, a couple of hard men buying everybody drinks."

"Names?"

"Animal and The Mad Egyptian."

"Where do they drag up handles like that?"

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Tuesday Noon shrugged his shoulders. "There'll be a drink in it for me, aye?"

"Aye," said Montgomerie.

In the dim bar, Animal and The Mad Egyptian looked up with bleary eyes at King and Montgomerie and at the uniforms behind them.

"Hi, boys," said Montgomerie.

"Which one of you used the bit of wood on that guy?" asked King.

"He did," said both neds in unison, pointing to each other.

It was all wrapped up with satisfying rapidity—three confessions signed, three men charged with culpable homicide, detained to appear before the sheriff in the morning, then to be remanded in custody prior to trial at the High Court in Glasgow. There was a second investigation to be mounted in respect of McGinley and a string of robberies and insurance frauds, but that, thought Fabian Donoghue, could be started in the morning.

He filled a pipe that would accompany him through most of the drive home to Edinburgh and quietly and unhurriedly left his office. Montgomerie met up with 'Ronica and took her to a nightclub. Richard King went home and murmured something about getting on with the decorating before he fell asleep in the armchair.

And Raymond Sussock—Raymond Sussock left the claustrophobia of his rented room and went out for a fish supper. He ate it standing on the street corner. Then he made a phonecall. He left the phonebox with a spring in his step and hailed a cab to take him to Langside. He climbed a stairway and stopped when he came to a door marked WILLEMS. He pressed the bell. She opened the door, her blonde hair now falling about her shoulders, wearing a full-length white-toweling bathrobe which he knew covered nothing but her Nordic goddess body. She smiled. He smiled.

"Look, I'm sorry," he said. "Really sorry for what I said."

"Forgiven," she said and stepped aside. Raymond Sussock went into Elka Willems' flat and she shut the door gently but firmly behind him.

"Q"

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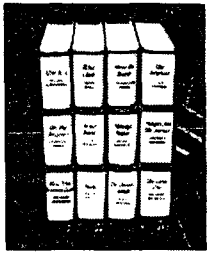

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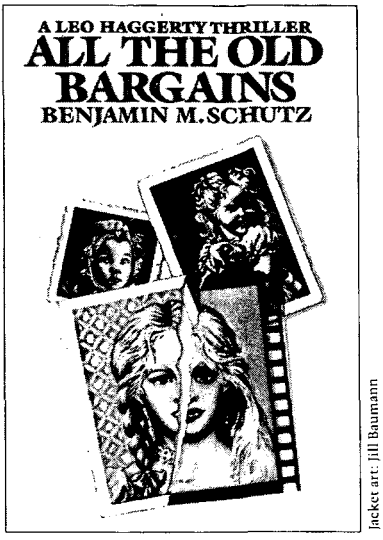

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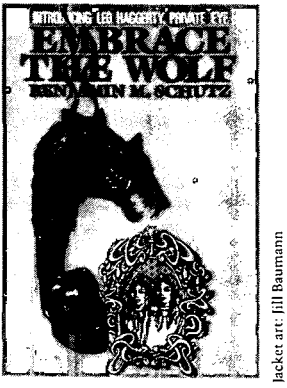

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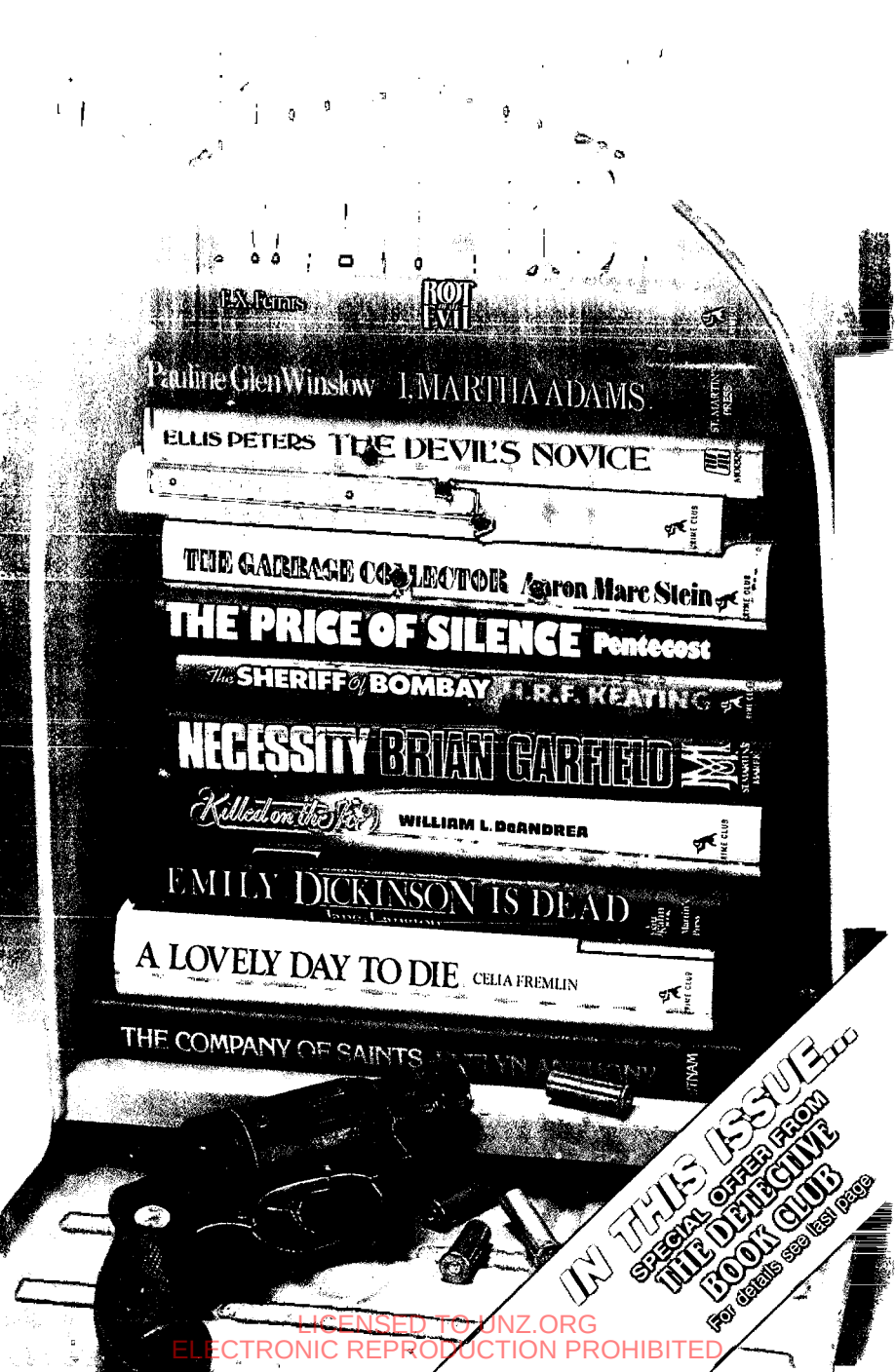
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